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FAITH ARROWBY

OR THE SMUGGLER'S CAVE

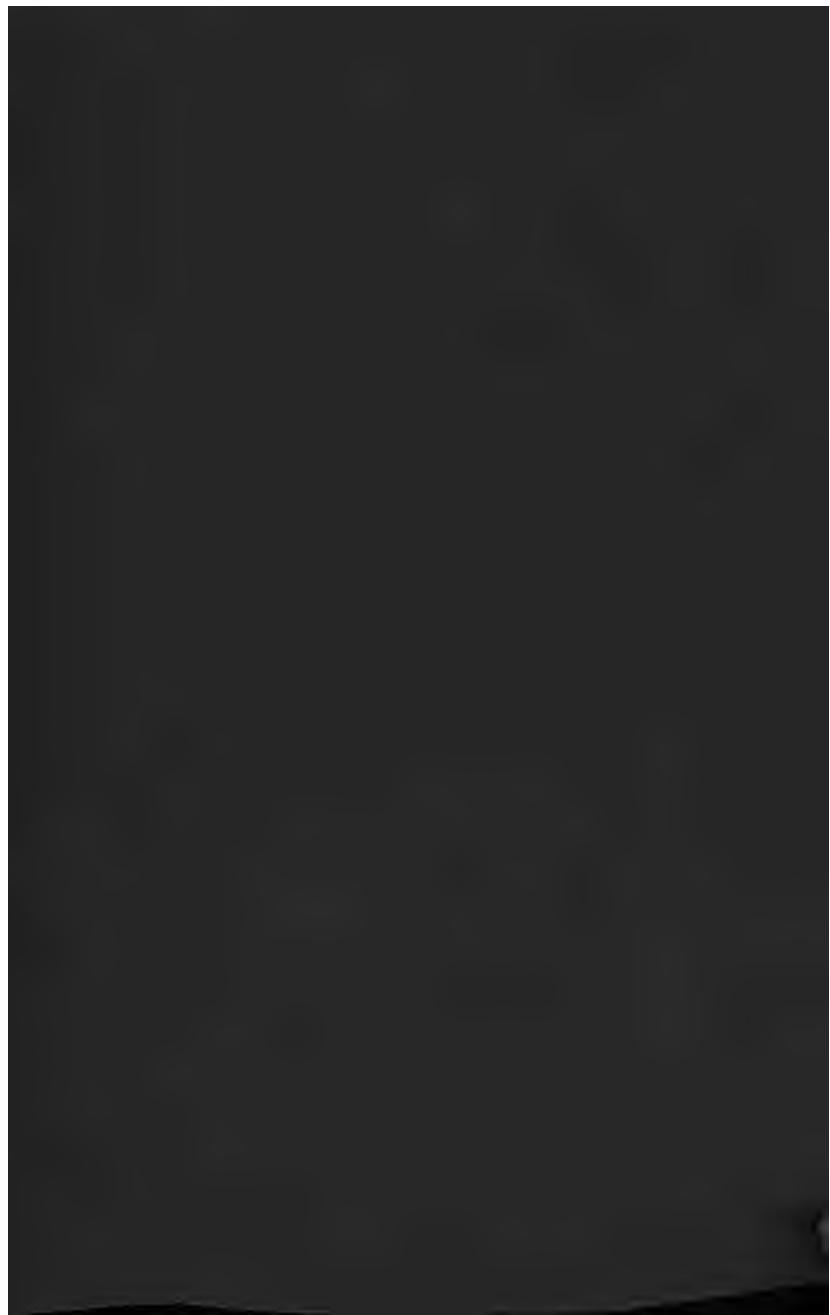


Be thou faithful unto death
And I will give thee a crown of life



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FAITH HARROWBY.





MARGARET HOLT'S STORY, p 12.

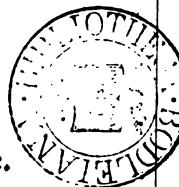




FAITH HARROWBY;

OR,

The Smugglers' Cave.



BY
SARAH DOUDNEY,

Author of "The Beautiful Island," "Under Grey Walls," &c.

LONDON :
SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION,
56, OLD BAILEY, E.C.

NEW YORK :
THOMAS NELSON AND SONS,
42, BLEECKER STREET.

1871.

250. 3. 112.

LONDON:

J. AND W. RIDER, PRINTERS,
BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE.

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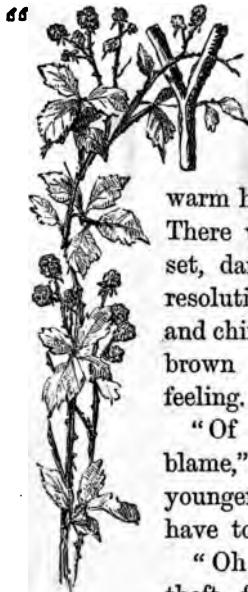
FAITH HARROWBY;

OR,

The Smugglers' Cave.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISCOVERY.



“ES,” said Faith Harrowby, “aunt Dorcas is very harsh in her judgments—very harsh indeed.”

Faith was fourteen years of age, a clever, clear-headed girl, with a warm heart and a strong will of her own. There was a determined look in her deep-set, dark eyes, and an expression of quiet resolution about the outlines of her mouth and chin. And as she spoke, her handsome brown face was flushed with suppressed feeling.

“Of course poor Tom was greatly to blame,” said Violet, who was two years younger than her sister; “he oughtn’t to have touched his master’s money.”

“Oh no, I don’t mean to excuse the theft, for it *was* a theft, although he intended to restore the sum; but it was his first offence,

and I think aunt Dorcas need not have spoken of it so harshly to the poor fellow's own mother!"

"That's just her way," rejoined Violet; "she has a fashion of stiffening her face when she's going to reprove anybody. If she only knew how dreadfully hard and unpleasant she looked at such times she'd never do it again."

"She doesn't care about her looks," said Faith, sagely; "she's gone past all that sort of thing."

The two girls were walking rapidly over a wide common, covered with short, thymy grass, which made the turf elastic under foot. A few cattle were scattered browsing here and there, but there was no human habitation in sight, although one or two charred and blackened spots on the sod betokened the recent encampment of gipsies. They went their way silently, absorbed in thinking about Tom Warner and his difficulties.

Tom was a fine, intelligent lad, the brother of their own maid Eliza. He had lately obtained a situation as junior clerk in a merchant's office, and appeared at first to have given much satisfaction to his employer. But trouble came to the Warners in the person of John, the eldest son, who was the black sheep of the family. This scapegrace, after causing his friends great uneasiness, finally enlisted, and having taken the Queen's shilling, instantly repented of the freak. And foolish Tom, anxious to get his brother out of the scrape, took his master's money to buy John's release, intending to pay back the sum.

Perhaps, in the end, it was well for Tom that this, his

first act of dishonesty, was discovered ; his punishment was just, but severe, for although his employer refrained from prosecuting him, he was summarily dismissed, and branded as a thief. Mrs. Warner came to tell Eliza the bad news, and had ventured to ask aunt Dorcas to say a word in the boy's favour. But this Miss Harrowby refused to do, at the same time giving utterance to such hard things, that the poor widow went away weeping, and Faith was filled with burning indignation.

The common terminated abruptly, leading off upon a white and dusty high road, furrowed deeply with the tracks of wheels. Along the road-side the footpath gradually rose higher and higher, until it ceased to run parallel with the main way, ascending the steep sides of a range of chalk hills. The girls climbed this path, following it as far as it went, and then pursued their course up the downs, with the strong, fresh breeze blowing full into their faces.

Far beneath them, the feet of the hills were girdled with fertile fields, varying from shades of rich green to the golden brown of the newly turned soil ; the afternoon sunshine lay there, warm and still, and the floating cloud-shadows crossed them at intervals ; there was nothing to break their absolute quiet and repose. Farther off were scattered villages and farms, and the spires of three churches rose above the trees ; then came the wide blue expanse of the sea, and the faint line between sky and ocean.

“ I like it very much,” said Violet, when she had gazed for some moments. “ But I think I prefer the other side of this hill, Faith.”

“Ah, yes, you are so fond of looking at the old castle,” rejoined her sister, rising. “Let us go and sit where we can see it.”

They walked across the summit of the hill, a broad, level platform covered with springy turf. From this point the horizon line was formed by a long reach of land, with the sea washing its sides, and midway between this distant boundary and the shores nearest to them stood a ruined castle, rising apparently out of the water.

“I wish I knew the history of that old place,” remarked Violet.

There was a pause which lasted for some minutes, and then Faith roused herself from a fit of musing, and came suddenly back to the subject.

“I can tell you something about that castle, Violet. It was once the favourite haunt of a party of smugglers, who managed for a long while to defeat the vigilance of the coastguard. In those days the water used to come almost to the base of this hill, for the sea, you know, is always giving and taking.”

“But the smugglers?”

“Well, it is said that they used to hide their booty somewhere among these hills, until they could seize an opportunity of conveying it to the castle. The coastguard would try to intercept them before they reached their principal stronghold, and then they had desperate encounters, like those which Sir Walter Scott describes in ‘Guy Mannering.’”

“But how could they hide their plunder here?”

“They dug caves in the chalk, and buried their stores of rum and brandy in them, closing up the entrances

with turf, and leaving some clue by which they might know the spot again."

"And don't those caves exist still?"

"Yes, Mr. Brixton says that the lime-burners have come upon them sometimes, and that relics of the smugglers have been found in them."

"What relics?"

"Nothing of value, only empty casks and the like."





CHAPTER II.

AN ADVENTURE.



HE afternoon was on the wane, and the girls began to think of turning their steps homewards, but the cool, fragrant air, and lovely landscape tempted them to linger, and they strayed hither and thither about the hills,

running races down their sides. At last, Violet, who was usually the first to tire of sport, flung herself down in a sheltered spot between two stunted bushes of gorse, and declared that she could not attempt the homeward walk without a few minutes' rest.

“Well, don't stay too long,” said Faith.

Violet, still panting and exhausted, leaned back upon the turf, resting her whole weight upon one elbow. Behind her the hill-side rose abruptly to a considerable height, and at her feet was a smooth piece of level ground; it was altogether as comfortable a resting-place as she could have desired.

“Faith,” she cried, suddenly, “what's this? My arm is sinking into the sod!”

She raised herself as she spoke, showing that the turf behind her was pressed inwards. Faith instantly stooped down, and doubling her fist, thumped the indented spot lustily, until the ground gave way before her blows, affording a glimpse of a dark cavity.

“Really,” she said, “I think we have made a discovery.”

“Don't put your hand into the hole,” pleaded Violet, in some alarm, “something may seize it!”

“Nonsense!” returned Faith, stoutly; and she broke away piece after piece of turf, until the opening increased in size, and was large enough to admit a man's head.

“It's perfectly dark inside,” she remarked, after attempting to peer into the obscurity, “but I believe that we've found a veritable smugglers' cave. We can't stop to explore it now, that's certain, and we couldn't see the inside of it without a candle. But we'll come here

again to-morrow, and I'll bring some matches and a little wax taper with me."

They gathered together the loose bits of turf, and laid them lightly over the aperture, to conceal it from any chance passer by. This done, they set off at full speed on their way home, anticipating a scolding from aunt Dorcas for being late.

But happily for her nieces, Miss Harrowby had been entertaining visitors during the whole of the afternoon, and she and Madame D'Arville were occupied in discussing the news they had heard, and the dress and manners of those who had called upon them.

Eliza lost no time in assisting her young ladies to remove their walking garb, and put on the pretty lace-trimmed silk frocks that were laid out on the beds in readiness for the wearers ; but while her nimble fingers were busy with Faith's raven braids, those quick, dark eyes were studying the reflection of the maid's face in the looking-glass, and taking note of the fact that she had been recently crying.

"I hope there's no fresh trouble, Eliza ?" she inquired, kindly.

"No, miss, thank you ; it's only the old grief about Tom, but your aunt has been speaking of it again to me, and she says such bitter things."

She drew her breath quickly to keep back a sob, and again the deep flush mounted into Faith's cheeks as she repeated, indignantly, "Aunt Dorcas is very harsh in her judgments !"

Released from their studies on the next day, their out-of-door attire was donned with all speed ; and then Faith

with a slight air of mystery, went to her desk, unlocked it, and took from a certain compartment half a dozen wax matches and a little taper.

"And now," she said, in her decided tone, "let us be off."

The glorious month of May was drawing to a close, and already the orchards were covered with a snowy carpet of fallen blossoms. There were spots of brilliant colour in the garden beds, and from the meadows came the fresh, delicious odour of the long grass ready for the scythe. Yet never before had the road to the hills seemed so long; the common appeared interminable, and when at last it was crossed, and they began to ascend the winding hill-side path, their hearts were throbbing fast with excitement and impatience.

And now they had come in sight of the two stunted bushes, and were drawing near the spot where their discovery had been made.

They stood before the place eager and breathless, and then a cry of surprise burst from the lips of each. The turf which had concealed the entrance of the cavity was broken away, and the loose pieces had been apparently heaped together to form a sort of barrier. It was evident that some one else had found out their secret, and they stood still for some moments in silent wonder.

"I don't care," said Faith, resolutely, "I'm determined to see what's in there."

"But if some one should be hiding?" suggested Violet, drawing back.

"That's not in the least likely. I suspect that some shepherd, or may be one of the lime-burners, passed the

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spot after we had left it, and seeing the turf was disturbed, had the curiosity to make investigations. Come, don't turn coward, but help me to remove this heap of clods."

They went to work in right earnest, and soon cleared the opening. It was considerably larger than it had been on the preceding evening, and they could squeeze themselves through it without difficulty. But before entering, Faith produced her matches and lit her taper.

"Now," she said, jestingly, "keep up your courage, and let us explore the Smugglers' Cave. Here goes!" and she crept through the aperture, taking care that her taper should not be extinguished.

"What's it like?" asked her sister from without.

"A charming place,"—Faith's voice had a muffled sound,—"walls encrusted with diamonds and glittering with golden ore, and—"

"Don't tell stories!" cried Violet, reproachfully.

"Well, then, come and see for yourself."



CHAPTER III.

MARGARET HOLT'S STORY.



HE younger girl after a moment's hesitation timidly entered the hole, and then her first sensations were those of disappointment. She found herself standing in a narrow passage rudely cut in the solid chalk, and the light of the taper showed nothing but the rugged masses of yellowish white on either side.

"There's nothing here," she said impatiently. "Let's come out, Faith."

"No; I'm determined to go on and find the end of it." They had not far to go; the passage suddenly widened and terminated in a sort of chamber, of the size of which they could not judge without closely inspecting it, for their light only shone a little way into the gloom. Then Faith, who was pressing boldly forwards, suddenly struck her foot against something which returned a ringing sound.

“Now for the treasure!” she cried, laughing, and stooping down to bring her taper to bear upon the object.

“What have you found?” asked Violet from behind.

Her laugh rang louder. “It’s nothing but an old lantern,” she exclaimed, raising herself. “I suppose the smugglers——”

But her sentence was left unfinished, for when she held up her light again, its rays fell directly upon a human face, which was confronting her with wild, glittering eyes.

For a moment the girl’s high courage failed, her heart seemed to stop beating, and a cold dew broke out upon her forehead. Involuntarily she started back a few paces, and Violet, who had not caught a glimpse of the strange face, clung to her skirts and shared her sudden terror without knowing its cause.

“Don’t be afraid of me!” cried a voice piteously, “I’m only a poor wretched girl.”

Violet’s answer was a loud scream, but all Faith’s self-control came back at once.

“Hush!” she said, speaking authoritatively to her sister. “Nothing will hurt you.” And she advanced nearer to the unknown speaker, holding her light close to the countenance whose sudden appearance had caused her such alarm. It was the face of a girl about a year older than herself.

“Are you here alone?” was Faith’s first question.

“Yes, yes; but you won’t tell any one that you’ve found me? I’m a poor hunted creature.”

“I am not going to betray you,” was the steadfast answer, “I’m not hard-hearted. Come to the entrance of the cave, and let me look at you.”

"Is there anybody there? I *must* keep myself hidden, I must indeed!"

"No; my sister and I came here alone; we very seldom meet a single person on these hills; I'm sure you won't be seen."

"I'll trust you," said the stranger after a pause, "I don't think you'll be cruel enough to deceive me." And she followed them towards the place where the daylight streamed into the gloomy cave. The sisters emerged from the strange hiding-place with a sense of infinite relief. But their new acquaintance cowered timidly behind the dwarfed bushes, close to the opening.

"What makes you afraid?" demanded Faith; "have you done anything wrong?"

"Oh yes, something very, very wrong!"

"Tell me all about it," said Faith, "I'll promise to keep your secret and to help you if I can; and you'll do the same, won't you?" she added, turning to her sister.

Violet readily assented, drawing near the stranger with an air of shy kindness, which the forlorn creature understood at once. Then, after casting an anxious glance over the quiet downs, she began to tell her story in a low unsteady tone.

"My name is Margaret Holt, and I was born in a little village on the cliffs, many miles off. The place is called Seawall, and they are mostly fisher-folk who live there. My father was a fisherman, an honest hard-working man, who saved his earnings, and he and mother put me to school, for I was an only child, and they made much of me. But when I was just thirteen, poor

father died, and then all our troubles came upon us. Mother was a timid soul, who always needed somebody to take care of her, and she was persuaded to marry again. There was no peace for us after that day.

“It’s hard to tell, but it was much harder to bear. James Harker, that was his name, was disappointed when he found that mother’s savings were so small: and then he began to beat and ill-use us both. More than once the neighbours came in and took our part, or he would have murdered us. Our life grew worse and worse, and we were well-nigh worn out with wretchedness, until one day there came an end to it all. We were sitting at work in our little kitchen, and fretting over our troubles, as we always did, when Harker opened the door and walked in, looking like a fiend. First he asked mother for money, and when the poor thing told him she had none to give him, he lit a lucifer match and set fire to her gown. Ah, I thought I should have gone mad when I saw the flames mounting up higher and higher; and when I ran to help her he held me back—it’s the truth I tell you. But just then a fisherman named Sam Brock, who had been a comrade of poor father’s, was passing by the door and heard our screams. He rushed in, tearing off his rough jacket, and wrapped it round my mother to smother the fire, and she was saved. I told him then whose doing it was, and he dragged Harker outside the cottage and gave him a terrible beating; for Brock was a big strong fellow, and as bold as a lion.”

“I’m glad of it,” cried Faith, with flashing eyes, “it was nobly done.”

"Mother was taken to an hospital some miles away, and careful nursing soon healed her burns. I got some rough work to do, and took a poor lodging in Redport, that I might go to see her constantly, and the people of the place were very kind to us.

"There were some good ladies who used to come and visit the patients; and one day when I was sitting by mother's bedside, they took notice of me, and after hearing my story, offered to get me a situation. So it was all settled, and I was to go back to Seawall to put my things together. I had a long way to go, for Redport is nearly seven miles away from our village; but I was too happy to feel tired, and thought nothing about the distance. Well, I chose the path that leads along the cliffs—a rough way, and dangerous in some places where it comes near the edge, for there is no railing put up to keep one from falling over; but I'm well used to those parts, and never felt afraid.

"I was just within half a mile from Seawall, when I saw a man rise up from the pathway on the side nearest the edge of the cliffs; he'd been crouching there among some loose stones, and I recognised him at once when he stood up—it was my mother's wicked husband who was waiting for me. There was nothing to be gained by turning back, so I just went straight on, and something seemed to give me strange courage. I passed him by without turning my head to look into his evil face. He followed me and savagely clutched my shoulder, threatening to kill me. I can't describe what I felt at that moment—all the pent-up passion within me struggled to get free, and I let it have its way.

There must have been a look in my eyes which made him quail, for as I turned and faced him, he stepped backwards and dropped the hand that was raised to strike me. I thought of all the injuries he had done us; I thought of my mother lying burnt and scarred in the hospital ward; and then I rushed at him headlong, dealing him a blow with all my force. He was unprepared for it; he staggered, reeled, and fell sheer over the cliff. Ah, his fearful cry rings in my ears now! There was a heavy splash in the sea, far, far below, and then all was silent. Suddenly I saw two men coming up from the village at full speed; they were near enough to have seen what had happened, and I knew that I must fly for my life. I ran wildly back along the road by which I came, hearing their shouts behind me. And thus I made my way to these hills, always fearing that I should be overtaken and captured, but as yet I have escaped. I was roaming about here last evening when I discovered this spot where the earth had been broken away, and I forced an entrance into the cave, lying down at last to sleep without fear."



CHAPTER IV.

PERPLEXITY.—THE FALSE ACCUSATION.



DEEP silence followed Margaret Holt's last words; her story was so strange and terrible, that her hearers appeared to be struck dumb.

"How long ago was this?" Faith asked.

"A fortnight," replied Margaret.

The unhappy girl had leaned back upon the sod with closed eyes. Faith regarded her with the utmost pity, and her next question was very gently spoken.

"Have you eaten anything lately?"

"Not since yesterday morning; then I begged a slice of bread from a woman who was standing at a cottage door."

Violet instantly began to turn out her pocket. "Oh, how fortunate," she exclaimed, "that cook happened to give me some gingerbread cakes! I declare I had forgotten them until this moment."

She gave the cakes to Margaret, who strove to utter her thanks, but burst forth into loud sobs instead. It was some minutes before tears came too, but when they

did flow, the poor girl's full heart was relieved, and Faith set to work to comfort her.

"You shall stay here and rest as long as you like," said she, "and we'll bring you food to-morrow afternoon; we can't come to you sooner, I wish we could. And we'll consider what's best to be done for you, but I think you would be quite safe if you could leave the country."

"I've thought of that," said Margaret eagerly; "I know I dare not remain in England, but if I could reach America or some far-off place, perhaps I could get a living, and might find means to let mother know something of me."

Again Faith promised to think over the matter, and then prepared to leave the spot. They wished Margaret a kindly good-bye, and she crept timidly back into the cave, to forget her sorrows in sleep.

That night, when the sisters went up to their chamber, they desired to be alone together that they might talk over the great event of the day. But Eliza was there, helping them to undress, and they waited until she had left the room before a word respecting their secret was spoken between them. Then, when the sound of her footsteps had died away in the passage, Faith jumped out of her little white-curtained bed and crossed the room to Violet.

"Violet," she whispered, "how much money have you?"

"I have two whole sovereigns in my drawer," replied the little girl.

"And I have three in my desk; five pounds wouldn't

be enough to take Margaret Holt to America, but I have thought of another plan; what do you say to sending her to France?"

"That wouldn't be far enough away, would it?"

"I think she could not easily be traced there; she might take another name and be a servant in one of the large hotels. I have heard that they are glad to engage a chambermaid who speaks English."

"But how could she manage to cross the water?"

"There would be risk, certainly; but I believe it could be done. We must find some means of dressing her decently, and she might then make her way to Greybeach, from whence there are always vessels starting for the French coast. For a trifling sum the captain of one of these would take her to Boulogne or some other seaport; but if the police are looking out for her, she will have great difficulty in escaping."

"Don't you think we ought to tell aunt Dorcas?"

"No," said Faith, sternly, "we don't want this girl to be hanged; we wish her to spend a useful life, full of repentance and good deeds. Aunt Dorcas would give her up at once to the police authorities; if she could say such severe things about Tom Warner's little offence, how would she treat Margaret Holt's great crime?"

She turned to the window, putting back the muslin curtains and drawing up the blind: it was a fair, still night, a young moon sailed along the dusky purple of the sky, and a few silvery clouds trailed their white skirts after her.

"Her provocation was very great," she said, softly.

"Ah, how good God is to me! He has not suffered me to be tried and tempted! Had I been in her place I might have done just the same."

The younger girl was already fast asleep, but long after Faith had shut out the sight of the dim hills, and sought her dainty little bed, she did not close her eyes.

"Why, Faith, how pale you are!" said Violet, on the next day, as her sister stood before the glass, hurriedly arranging her hat and jacket.

"I don't feel comfortable," was the answer. "I'm going to do a dishonourable action, and I dislike it very much."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you forgotten that we must take some food to Margaret? Well, there's a veal pie in the larder, and I intend to steal it presently. And she will want some water."

"Let us take one of the empty stone jars from the cellar," suggested Violet: "and we can get water from the brook on our way to the hills."

Fortune seemed to favour their plans that afternoon, for cook was asleep in the kitchen, while Eliza and the housemaid were in the garden gathering fruit and flowers for dessert, and chatting with the gardener. Violet easily made her way to the cellar unobserved, and returned with the jar, with which she stole cautiously out at the back door, and then hiding herself behind the stable wall stood waiting for her sister. Faith's task was more difficult; she had to glide with noiseless footsteps through the long stone passage leading to the pantry, passing the open door of the kitchen on her

way. If she should happen to awaken cook, her chance was lost. But the good woman's slumbers were sound, and Faith's stealthy movements did not disturb them. She achieved her purpose and rejoined Violet, carrying the pie covered with her handkerchief.

"Give me the jar," Faith said; "the pie is not so heavy as that."

They hurried on, stopping at the brook to fill the jar with the cool sparkling water, and then Violet triumphantly showed a small milk-jug of delicate china which Margaret could use as a drinking-cup.

"It belongs to my own little tea-service, you know," said she, "so that I may do with it as I please."

Once or twice they sat down by the wayside to rest, for their burdens were heavy, and Violet wondered more and more at her sister's grave pale face. The truth was that Faith heartily despised the mean action which she had just committed; it went sorely against her proud and upright nature to steal a pie from her aunt's pantry, and the sense of self-degradation was infinitely painful to her.

But the first glimpse of Margaret's worn face and eager eyes stirred up her compassion again, and her self-reproaches were silenced for a time. The poor girl devoured the food like one half famished, and spoke her thanks so eloquently that Violet turned aside to hide her tears. Then they began to speak of the plans they had formed on her behalf, how she was to be provided with one of Faith's dresses, and furnished with the sum of five pounds; how she was to make her way to Greybeach, and from thence take her departure

in a French vessel. Once away from England, they believed that she would not be pursued.

Their schemes were romantic and ill-constructed, yet Margaret listened to them as to words of wisdom. But fear and fatigue had so exhausted her strength that it seemed uncertain whether she could undertake the journey to Greybeach until she was sufficiently rested. Her limbs were stiff and weary, her feet sore and blistered, Greybeach was more than twelve miles away; and so, after a long conference, it was decided that for the next two or three days she should remain where she was.

The sisters left her, promising to return on Monday afternoon with a fresh supply of food. And no sooner had they turned their backs upon the hills than all Faith's qualms of conscience came back, added to the certainty that the loss of the pie would have been discovered during their absence.

“How angry aunt Dorcas would be if she knew it!” said Violet.

They reached the house and lingered on the doorsteps, unwilling to enter, although the warning sound of a bell within told them that the dinner hour was fast approaching. And scarcely had they set foot within the pretty chamber when a new cause of dismay presented itself; for there, sitting on the floor with her face buried in her hands, and her whole frame quivering with suppressed sobs, was Eliza.

“Oh, Miss Faith,” she began, as she raised herself from the floor, “it seems as if I’m never to know a day’s peace again; one trial follows another, that it does!”

"What is it, Eliza? Sit down and tell me all about it," said Faith, kindly.

"Well, miss, my poor mother came to see me this afternoon. She stayed about an hour, and after she was gone I was standing in the kitchen saying a few words to cook, when mistress came down-stairs. She began to tell cook that some ladies were coming to lunch here on Monday, and asked what there was in the larder. And cook said that there was a veal pie——"

Violet uttered a little cry of horror, but her sister gave her a warning glance.

"Mistress followed cook into the pantry," continued Eliza, who was too much excited to notice the interruption, "and presently cook came out again with a scared sort of look. 'The pie's gone,' said she, 'twas a lovely pie too,—I made it this morning.' Then your aunt declared that somebody must have stolen it, and she asked if we'd seen any tramps or gipsies about the house. 'No, ma'am,' says cook, 'not a soul has been here to-day but Eliza's mother.'"

"You know that mistress is very hard sometimes," the girl went on, "and she actually said she believed that mother had stolen the pie. Cook spoke up and said that Mrs. Warner was as honest a woman as ever breathed; but your aunt brought up that matter of poor Tom, saying she thought he wouldn't have gone wrong if he'd had a good example at home. It was too much for me, Miss Faith, it was indeed;—I was hot, I know;—I flashed out at mistress like fire, and she gave me warning."



CHAPTER V. •

CONFSSION.—A WRETCHED SUNDAY.—RELIEF AT HAND.



ELIZA went up to the weeping servant, and laying her hands upon the girl's shoulders, said firmly,—

“ Eliza, you shall not go; I know where that pie went, for I took it myself, and I shall tell aunt Dorcas so.”

The maid stared at her in astonishment. "Took it yourself, miss!" she repeated, incredulously.

"Yes, it is quite true. And now, Eliza, please get us ready for dinner, for I am quite impatient to clear Mrs. Warner to my aunt."

"But, Miss Faith, what made you——"

"You mustn't ask me a single question about it; I shall not tell any one why I took the pie."

Eliza knew that when Miss Faith spoke in that tone she must be obeyed, and she proceeded at once with the young ladies' toilet in silence. She was convinced, however, that they would get into trouble with Miss Harrowby, who always required that her nieces should make her acquainted with all their actions. Neither of the girls spoke another word, and when the dinner-bell rang, they walked down-stairs arm in arm to the dining-room.

There was a shade upon their aunt's face when they entered. She was chafing inwardly at the unpleasant course which things had taken, when Faith, instead of going to her usual seat at the table, marched deliberately up to her, and said quietly,—

"Aunt Dorcas, it was I who took the pie; I am very sorry that poor Mrs. Warner should have been unjustly accused."

"You took the pie!" echoed Miss Harrowby, in a bewildered tone; "what do you mean, Faith? Are you crazy?"

"I took it," repeated her niece, steadily. "I am stating the simple truth."

"Did you eat it?" was the next question.

“ No.”

“ Then why did you take it ? Come, you had better make an open confession. What foolish thing have you been doing ? ”

“ Aunt Dorcas,” said Faith, speaking with a great effort, “ I know I did very wrong to take your pie, it was a deliberate theft ; but pray do not ask me what I did with it, for I cannot tell you.”

“ But you must and shall tell me, child ! I don’t care about the pie, but I will not allow you to have secrets from me.”

“ This is the first time, aunt, that I have ever concealed anything from you.”

“ Violet, come here directly,” called Miss Harrowby. “ Do you know why your sister stole the pie ? ”

“ She does know,” replied the elder girl, answering for her, “ but the blame rests entirely with me.”

“ Now, Violet, tell me all about it,” said her aunt.

But the younger sister stood firm ; she glanced imploringly at Faith once or twice, and seeing no sign of relenting in the other’s dark eyes and compressed lips, she persisted in keeping the secret.

“ Go out of my sight, both of you,” exclaimed aunt Dorcas, whose patience was now completely exhausted ; “ I shall send your dinner into the schoolroom. I declare, Faith, I had no idea that you were such a wicked, obstinate girl, and you have positively made your sister as bad as yourself. I must write to your father about you.”

The girls left the room in utter silence, but the last thrust had gone home. Their father was in India, and

he had consigned his motherless daughters to his sister's care.

"We must confess now—we can't help it," pleaded Violet.

"No, we must *not*, we dare not betray Margaret; perhaps her life depends on our silence, and whatever happens to us, we must be true to her."

The day passed on, bedtime came, and when Violet had cried herself to sleep, Faith sat for hours at the window, looking out into the moonlight, and trying to decide for herself betwixt right and wrong. Violet's nature was so pliant, and her confidence in Faith was so absolute, that the girl's responsibilities were doubled by this close companionship. She knew that Violet's character would be a reflection of her own, only that in the younger sister's case the lights would be paler and the shadows fainter, but there would be the same outlines—the same general details. In going wrong herself she would spoil both her father's children; it was a terrible thought, and she pondered over it until her powers of thinking almost failed.

She awoke in the morning with a vague consciousness of something having gone amiss. Eliza came to the bedside, and stood looking at her anxiously, reading the signs of mental suffering in her pale face and weary eyes.

"Are you rested sufficiently, Miss Faith?" she asked, "or would you like to lie still a little longer? Miss Violet is up and dressed."

"I will get up directly. Ah! it is Sunday, I had almost forgotten that."

She was feeling strangely languid and unlike her usual self as she proceeded down-stairs to the breakfast-room, where the household were already assembled for prayers.

Aunt Dorcas took no notice of her entrance ; Madame D'Arville's greeting was as distant as possible, and she slipped into a chair next to Violet. It was all new and strange and wretched.

They walked to church as usual, making a little procession ; the two girls going first, wearing their pretty fresh muslin dresses and delicate mauve bonnets, and then came Aunt Dorcas and Madame, while Eliza and the page carrying the books, brought up the rear.

The sisters scarcely exchanged a sentence during their walk, but both were conscious of a sense of relief when they came out of the broad sunshine and into the subdued light of the beautiful old church. Faith remembered how, as a little child, she had gazed at the magnificent colours of the east window with a kind of awe-struck admiration, and had watched the many-tinted rays casting faint gleams over the cold white face of the crusader whose tomb stood close by the vestry door. There he lay, the old knight in his panoply of mail, looking as still and peaceful as ever ; and she recollects wondering in those childish days if he ever got up and wandered up and down the deserted aisles, returning to the stony pillow at cockcrow.

Mr. Brixton was one of the curates of St. Philip's, and Faith had alluded to him, when, on that memorable day on the hills, she had told Violet about the smugglers and their former haunts.

He had first given her information on this, as well as on many other subjects, encouraging her to talk freely and ask him questions whenever they met. It so happened that he occupied the pulpit this morning, and preached, as he always did, so simply and clearly, that the youngest child in the congregation could understand much of what was said.

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee,”—so ran his text; and he went on to show, in a few plain words, the folly and the ingratitude of those who persisted in carrying their own burdens, when there was such a mighty Hand stretched out to help them. Such persons, he said, must fall fainting by the wayside, for their mere human strength was unequal to the load they bore; and then, earnestly and affectionately, he invited all those who were “weary and heavy laden,” to come unto Him who alone could give them rest. Faith listened eagerly, for somehow both text and sermon seemed specially intended for her; and gradually she began to realize that she had been carrying her burden herself, instead of casting it upon the Lord. And when the service was over, she knelt down and simply asked Him in her heart to take this heavy weight and bear it for her; and having done this, she left the church with an easier mind.

Miss Harrowby always dined early on Sundays; and again the girls were banished to the schoolroom, Eliza bringing them their dinner as on the preceding day. The long golden hours of the afternoon dragged heavily by, and the bells chimed out again, sweetly and solemnly, bringing a message of peace and hope to many weary

hearts who listened to their music. But although it was time to get ready for evening service, Faith never stirred from her seat.

"I think she is sullen," said Aunt Dorcas to Madame. "She may stay at home if she likes. I have no objection."

She did remain at home, and her sister kept her company. They sat together in the schoolroom until the day closed in. And then the feeling of languor increased; her head ached sadly, and she crept up-stairs to bed.

In the morning it became evident to the whole household that Faith was really ill; but, although Miss Harrowby desired Madame to excuse her lessons, she did not soften in her manner towards her nieces: ill or well, she wished them to feel that they were still under the ban of her displeasure. Faith lay upon a little couch in her own room and thought of Margaret. The girl's stock of provisions would be exhausted, and she would look eagerly for the return of her friends. She resolved to persuade Violet, when she came from the schoolroom, to take her afternoon walk alone, first desiring her to go into a cottage and purchase a loaf of bread. At last her welcome footstep was heard outside the door, but when she appeared it was with a downcast face.

"Oh! Faith," she whispered, "Madame says that we are not to go beyond the garden until we have confessed what became of that horrid pie. We are to be kept as prisoners, and a watch will be set upon our actions. What is to become of Margaret?"

"I don't know," said Faith, brokenly; "I haven't any strength of mind left, and my head gets confused whenever I think of her."

But relief was nearer to them than they expected, and it came in the person of Mr. Brixton.

Mr. Brixton's visit was intended specially for Miss Harrowby's nieces, and he explained its object to the elder lady in the drawing-room. The parish attached to St. Philip's was a large and scattered one, including not only the substantial farms with their well-to-do tenants, but extending to the poverty-stricken dwellings on the sea-shore. There, while the fishermen pursued their calling, their wives and children made and sold fishing-nets, clothes-pegs, and other coarse articles of home manufacture; but generally speaking they had a hard time of it. Mr. Brixton's sympathies on behalf of these poor folks were thoroughly aroused, the more so when he found that this part of the parish had been much neglected. Having obtained his rector's leave, he set about building a large school-house which would stand among their own habitations. But funds were needed to complete this undertaking, and the curate hoped to obtain aid from the young ladies in the neighbourhood. He thought that by a sale of fancy work a considerable sum might be raised, and he had called that day to solicit the services of Faith and Violet.

"Can I see and speak with the young ladies myself?" said Mr. Brixton.

"Oh yes, certainly," rejoined Aunt Dorcas; "Faith was slightly indisposed this morning, but I dare say she is sufficiently recovered to come down-stairs." Not for

the world would the lady have had the clergyman suspect that there had been any interruption to the harmony of her household !

Presently Eliza tapped at their chamber door, announcing that Mr. Brixton was in the drawing-room, waiting to see them ; and at the mention of his name a light seemed to break in upon Faith.

" I will tell him everything," she exclaimed suddenly ; " he is a good and just man, and I'm sure we may trust him ; but then," she added, as her countenance fell, " how shall I contrive to see him alone ? I dare not speak before Aunt Dorcas."

" Slip a note into his hand, and ask him to call to-morrow while aunt is taking her drive," suggested Violet, who was burning to get rid of the troublesome secret.

No better idea presented itself, so Faith scribbled her note. But her mental disquiet had wrought a striking change in her appearance, and Mr. Brixton was grieved and astonished to see her bright face so altered. Aunt Dorcas, too, felt a pang of uneasiness when her niece entered, and began to wish that she had been more patient with her.



CHAPTER VI.

THE CLOUD PASSES AWAY.



ESPITE the anxiety under which she was labouring, Faith listened with deep interest while the curate unfolded his schemes.

“Oh! I am so glad to do something for those poor fisher-folk,” she exclaimed. “I have wished to go and visit them, but my aunt did not think——”

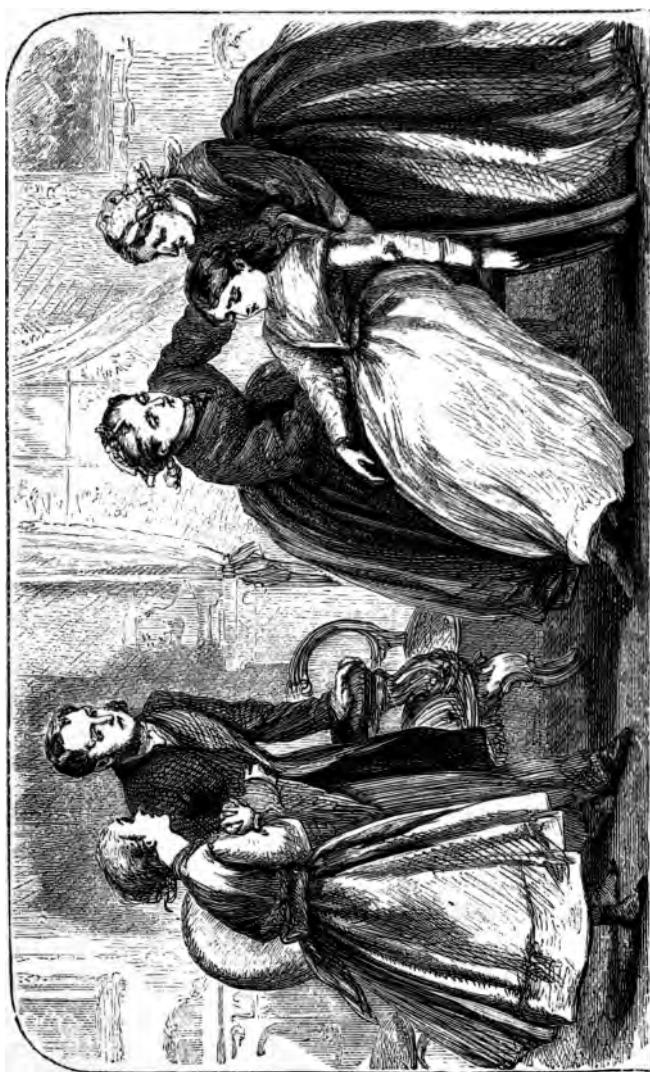
“They are such a rough set of people,” interposed Miss Harrowby, apologetically, “and Faith is very young and enthusiastic, you know, Mr. Brixton.”

“They are rough, it is true,” returned the clergyman, “but there is a great deal of good feeling amongst them, plenty of soil which will bear an excellent harvest by and by. A most singular proof of this came to my knowledge on Saturday.”

“Please tell us about it,” said Faith.

“I am glad to see I have awakened your interest,”

he replied, with a smile. " Well, there is one fisherman, just come to settle among them, to whom I have taken a strong liking. He is not a very polished specimen of humanity, I admit ; a great burly fellow, with a round red face, and a fist as heavy as a sledge-hammer ; but that big man's heart is in the right place. In addition to his own family—and he has seven or eight little lads and lasses—he has taken under his protection the wife of a former comrade of his, a poor ill-used creature nearly crazed with trouble. It seems that she had an only child, a daughter, who had always striven to shield her from the brutality of the man she had married, and according to my informant's description, he must have been an atrocious character. Against this girl her step-father conceived a special hatred. I won't sadden you now with the shocking details of his conduct ; it is sufficient to say that his unfortunate wife was obliged to be sent to the hospital in consequence of injuries sustained at his hands, the daughter having done all in her power to defend her. I am told that the girl came constantly to see her mother, and that her affectionate disposition and quiet manners were noticed by the nurses and doctors, and some charitable ladies who were visiting the patients volunteered to find her a situation. This offer was thankfully accepted, and she went back to her home in a little fishing village for the purpose of collecting her clothes and other belongings, before entering upon her new duties. My fisher-friend, Sam Brock by name, had himself been to Seawall that very morning, and was returning along the cliffs with a companion, when they witnessed a terrible scene. First they observed the



MR. BRIXTON HAS CLEARED UP EVERYTHING.

figure of a young girl coming along at a rapid pace, and then saw a man rushing after her with threatening gestures. They hastened their steps, and recognised at a glance that the two persons before them were poor Mrs. Harker's daughter, and her brutal husband. The girl seemed, as Sam Brock said, to be seized with sudden frenzy; goaded on, doubtless, by her step-father's menaces, she sprang at him, striking a violent blow which sent him backwards over the cliff. He disappeared with a loud cry, and she stood apparently horrified at her own action. There was a splash in the water following the cry, and then, seeing the two men advancing towards her, she flung up her arms wildly, and sped off like a frightened deer. But her mother's husband was not killed, he was not even injured——”

“Not killed!” shrieked Faith, in a voice that caused Mr. Brixton to start to his feet. Madame D'Arville and Aunt Dorcas hurried towards her and caught her in their arms, for she had fallen back on her seat in a fainting fit; the strain on her nerves—the keeping of Margaret's secret, had tried her strength severely, and she could not bear the strong shock of that sudden joy.

“Oh, Mr. Brixton,” cried Violet, “you have cleared up everything. It was for Margaret Holt that Faith stole the veal pie and made aunt Dorcas so angry; Margaret Holt is hiding in the smugglers' cave!”

The curate drew her to a corner of the room, and found a way to soothe her excitement before he extracted the particulars of the strange story from her. And all the while Aunt Dorcas was crying over Faith, and Madame and Eliza were using means to restore her to conscious-

ness. When she did come to herself, her first inquiry was for Mr. Brixton.

“Don’t let him go yet. I want to tell him everything,” she said. The clergyman would not let her agitate herself any more about the matter, however. He assured her that Violet had already told him all. And then it was arranged that he should start off at once to the cave, taking Violet as a guide, and that she should break the good news to the poor girl before he revealed himself, lest the sudden appearance of a stranger might alarm her.

In the meanwhile, a great change for the better had been stealing over Margaret Holt; the mercy and compassionate kindness of the two sisters had softened her heart, and other and more subtle influences were at work also. She resolved that when her kind friends returned to her she would set aside all their offers of helping her to leave the country, and go back at once to her mother to confess everything, and be dealt with as the law should decide. It was in this altered frame of mind that Violet found her on the memorable Monday afternoon when she brought her the tidings that James Harker was living still.

She was told afterwards how it had happened: he had stumbled backwards over the edge of the cliff, it is true; but then a broad ledge received him, and he soon recovered his footing; the splash in the water, which had seemed to Margaret’s ears to seal his fate, was caused by a large fragment of chalk, loosened by his fall, rolling down into the sea. The two men had shouted to her to turn back, but she had fled onwards in her wild terror.

fancying herself pursued. Then an unsuccessful search had been made for her, and honest, tender-hearted Sam Brock had taken her mother into his care.

Mr. Brixton and Violet brought her back with them to Miss Harrowby's house, and there her soiled and tattered garments were exchanged for clean and comfortable attire, and a substantial meal was spread before her. Aunt Dorcas was the first to speak a kind word to her, for the old lady's heart was deeply touched by the story of her sufferings, and I think it likely that her conscience reproached her for the indifference she had so long manifested towards her poorer neighbours. "Well, it is never too late to mend," she said to herself, and before Margaret quitted her roof she put a sovereign into her hand "to buy comforts for her poor mother."

On the following day Mr. Brixton called to tell all the particulars of Mrs. Harker's meeting with her lost daughter. No further molestation was to be apprehended from James Harker; he had been committed to prison for being concerned in a robbery, and on his release, means would be taken to insure his wife's safety. Faith listened to all these details, lying on a couch in the drawing-room, and before he took his departure the curate found an opportunity for a little quiet conversation with her.

"Miss Faith," he said gently, "hasn't this affair taught you that your own strength is perfect weakness?"

"Oh yes," she answered. "I can't tell you how heavy my burden was when I came to church on Sunday morning. I think I had been trusting too much in

myself, relying too much on my own judgment, and I feel so humble and sorry. I see now that I was doing just the worst thing in the world for Margaret in keeping her secret. And yet, how could I betray her?"

"Your case was a difficult one, but the best way would have been to induce her not to continue concealed. If that bad man Harker had really perished by his fall, Margaret could not have been convicted of a murder. She turned on him, in the first place, in self-defence, and the blow she struck was not intended to put an end to his life. Mind, I am not justifying her outburst of passion;—it was a sin, and she has been severely punished for it."

"No one would think, to look at Margaret, that she could be roused into fury; her face is so gentle in its expression, isn't it?"

"Ah, Miss Faith, we never know what is lurking in our natures until circumstances call it forth. Who would have supposed that the apostle Peter would have denied his Lord? This old saint failed on the very point on which he deemed himself strongest, and perhaps that was just why he failed. We cannot tell how much we owe to the restraining grace of God."

Mr. Brixton went his way, and Faith pondered deeply over what he had said to her. The good seed had been sown in her heart, and had taken root. It flourished and brought forth fruit in due season.

Afterwards, there was a long quiet talk between aunt Dorcas and her elder niece, in which the latter frankly owned herself in fault and craved forgiveness, and the former, when she granted it, dropped a hint that there

would henceforth be a better understanding between them. Violet was intensely happy in the improved state of things, and even Eliza came in for her share of gladness ; for the curate had volunteered to call on Tom's former master, and persuade him to give the lad another trial. So the clouds of reserve and ill-humour passed away from the household, never to return and overshadow it again.

* * * * *

Down on the pebbly beach, where the fishermen's cottages are scattered at intervals, three persons are standing, watching the sunset flushing over the sea and reddening the sails of the returning boats. Those two tall young ladies are Faith and Violet Harrowby, and the clergyman with whom they are talking is the rector of the parish, Mr. Brixton. Seven years have come and gone since the day when he brought comfort to the sisters in their trouble ; and when the old rector of Marksbourne died he was appointed to the vacant living, much to the gratification of the parishioners, amongst whom he had laboured so earnestly.

High up on the shore, beyond the reach of the sea-spray, stands the school-house—a strong, substantial brick building, with a picturesque belfry, and one or two hardy creepers clinging to its walls ; the interior of the porch is gay with scarlet geraniums in pots, and the schoolmistress stands at the door with her sewing, enjoying the time of rest after the day's toil.

“ Dear old Marksbourne,” says Faith, suddenly, “ how sorry I should be to leave it ! ”

" You are not going away from us, Miss Faith ?" asks the rector. " Surely your father will be induced to settle here, instead of taking you from all your old friends."

" I can't tell anything about his plans yet. It will be a hard trial for us if we have to say good-bye to our old home and go among strangers."

" We can't spare you, Miss Faith ;—there is no one who could fill your place."

" It's very kind of you to say so ;—I love the people, and the work that is going on here,—my heart is in it. But if I do indeed go away, there will be great comfort in thinking that all those in whom I have taken an interest are happy. Tom Warner and Margaret Holt have made quite a model couple, and their cottage is the prettiest I have ever seen ; poor Mrs. Harker, once more a widow, is the best of grandmothers to the little ones ; Sam Brock and his new boat are prospering bravely, and there is a wonderful change for the better in the condition of our poor fisher-folk. Ah, how it would grieve me to part from them all !"

" I don't think we shall have to do that," said Violet, cheerfully ; " I'm not half so useful as you are, Faith, but I love Marksbourne quite as dearly, and I mean to coax papa to stop in it. Hark ! do you hear the singing of the fishermen ? How softly their voices come to us, mingling with the murmur of the surf at our feet ! everybody seems to be happy this evening ; let us be happy too."



CHAPTER VII.

SIR OSCAR'S PARTRIDGES.

“ SN’T it rather a gloomy time of year for a wedding, Faith ? I should like to have been married in the spring.”

“ My dear, I can’t think how you can call it gloomy ! This is only the first



of September ; and there are all the lovely golden days to come,—it's the season which I prefer above all others."

Violet Harrowby turned towards the bed, whereon her wedding attire was laid out for her inspection. There was the crown of orange blossoms resting on the veil of filmy lace ; there were the little white gloves and boots, and above all, the robe of pearly satin. The bride elect stroked its soft, lustrous folds with an air of quiet satisfaction.

"Eliza says it is a dress fit for a princess," she remarked, after a pause, "and certainly nothing could be handsomer ; well, one ought to look one's best. I shouldn't like to be a dowdy bride. Why, Faith, what are you staring at ?" For the elder sister was standing at the window, gazing far out upon some distant point in the landscape. She had gone thither for the purpose of drawing up the blind, that the morning sunlight might shine in freely upon the bridal array ; and then she paused, as if her eye were suddenly arrested by some object of intense interest. The scene was fair enough to have kept her glance wandering over its details if they had been unfamiliar to her. There were peaceful pasture lands, and broad harvest-fields newly reaped ; rich, dark masses of wood here and there, and a range of low-lying hills on the left, while on the right lay the wide expanse of ocean, with white sails glimmering on its dim, blue-grey waters. But Faith's gaze took no note of any of these features. Her look was fixed steadfastly upon a tall, slender spire, which rose above a thick cluster of trees. She turned her head, smiling at her sister's question, and was about to speak, when the creaking of

the heavy gate, and the sound of footsteps crunching on the gravel of the carriage drive, interrupted her.

"Here comes Sir Oscar," exclaimed Violet, drawing a step nearer to the open window. "Look, he's bringing some partridges."

A tall athletic man, clad in a shooting costume, was approaching the hall door, swinging a couple of brace of birds in his hand. But at the sight of him the smile suddenly died away from Faith's lips.

"Is papa at home?" asked Violet.

"Yes, he said he shouldn't go out this morning."

Just then, Eliza, the lady's-maid, tapped at the door.

"If you please, Miss Faith, Sir Oscar Northwood has called, and the Colonel has sent me to ask you to go down."

"Didn't you say I was engaged with Miss Violet, Eliza?"

"The Colonel spoke in such a positive way, Miss Faith, that I couldn't say a word."

"There's no help for it then!" said Violet; and her sister silently quitted the room.

She went slowly down the old-fashioned staircase, touching the heavy oaken balustrade with her hand. At the foot of the stairs she came to a sudden halt, grasping the handrail tightly, while a strange, defiant expression settled on her features. And I am bound to say that no one who saw Faith Harrowby at that moment would have admitted that she had any sort of claim to beauty.

Voices came towards her from the open door of the breakfast-room, and thither she bent her steps. There were Colonel Harrowby and his visitor chatting together

and both looked at her scrutinizingly as she entered. Sir Oscar came forward to meet her.

“Good morning, Miss Faith; I’ve brought you some birds, the very first I have shot this season.”

“Thank you,” said Faith, simply, and she was about to add something more, when a low growl behind her caused her to turn sharply round. There was her enormous St. Bernard’s dog, which had followed her unobserved, preparing to do battle with the baronet’s retriever.

“Be quiet, Rollo!” she exclaimed; but the dog was not easily silenced, and it was with considerable difficulty that his mistress succeeded in coaxing him out of the room.

There was an ominous shade upon the Colonel’s brow when she returned and made her quiet apologies to Sir Oscar; and the dread of an outburst of her father’s wrath caused poor Faith’s manner to be more than usually stiff and constrained. But if Sir Oscar observed her want of cordiality, he did not appear to be in the least degree affected by it. He was to be one of the guests at Violet’s wedding, and he displayed a marked interest in the coming event.

“Brigham has some flowers ready for you, Miss Faith; he will cut them on Wednesday evening. One can’t have too many flowers at a wedding, you know.”

“You are very kind; our conservatory plants have not flourished this year.”

“Let Brigham come and look at them; he is reckoned clever at that sort of thing. It is really a pity that he should waste his talents on my greenhouses, as there’s

no one to admire them but myself. I get dreadfully lonely and moped at the Abbey, Miss Faith."

At these words an uncomfortable flush came into her cheeks, and her face grew quite forbidding in its sternness. She understood his tone well enough, and she could not help resenting it. He did not make a long stay, and no sooner had the hall door closed behind him than the storm which she had feared broke forth.

"Do you keep that savage brute, Rollo, on purpose to insult my friends?" demanded Colonel Harrowby, furiously.

"Oh, papa, you know I couldn't help it! I am so sorry that he should have followed me into the room."

"You behaved shamefully," he went on; "your manner to Sir Oscar wasn't decently civil. You are the most perverse and undutiful girl I ever saw in my life. Why don't you copy Violet's meekness and gentleness? *She* has never given me the slightest trouble. But I suppose I am only to have comfort in one of my children."

He fairly talked himself hoarse; and then Faith, who had listened to his tirade in utter silence, slipped out of the room and betook herself up-stairs to her own chamber. There she shut and locked the door, and going to the bedside, fell upon her knees and wept bitterly.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEXT ON THE TOMB.



OUR heroine thought of many things while her tears were flowing, and some of these thoughts made her sobs come thicker and faster. Memories of past childish days swept across her mind,—recollections of the time when she and Violet had lived with Aunt Dorcas Harrowby, and had looked forward to the period of their father's return from India with such eager hope and longing. She remembered how as she grew up into womanhood, she had learned to love and understand Aunt Dorcas better, for the rough edges of the old lady's character had worn smooth, and a strong bond of sympathy drew the aunt and niece closely together. And then the thought of Colonel Harrowby's coming home had become blended with the dread of leaving Marksbourne, with its old familiar scenes and friends; and its ancient parish church, wherein she had learned

the one great lesson of life. She recalled the first meeting with her father, and the vague sense of disappointment with which she hardly dared admit to herself. But it was with gratitude that she looked back to the single instance in which his will had yielded to the united entreaties of his children,—for their sakes alone he had consented to remain in the place they loved so well. Then came the gaieties of two seasons in London, the pomp and glitter of the great world of fashion, the new ideas and experiences which had seemed to put the simplicity of girlhood so far away from her. And this was followed by Violet's engagement, and her own introduction to Sir Oscar Northwood. It had been a restless, unsatisfactory life which she had led since she had quitted the shelter of Aunt Dorcas's home; her only intervals of peace were spent in Marksbourne, among her old haunts, where the poor, who had learned to love her, gladly welcomed her visits. Here alone she was able to gather together all the scattered threads of her existence, and to go on weaving them into the pattern she loved best. But now she feared that this sanctuary of hers, with its simple enjoyments and its quiet work, was to be invaded. Sir Oscar Northwood was the owner of Marksbourne Abbey and the squire of the place; he was beginning to intrude himself into her arrangements, and to be a frequent visitor at the house; and these unwelcome attentions of his were sowing the seeds of strife between her father and herself.

At length she lifted her pale, tear-stained face from her hands, and pushed back the hair from her forehead with a heavy sigh. Mechanically her eyes wandered

round the pretty room, with its various tokens of comfort and refinement, until her glance rested on an illuminated text which hung upon the wall, exactly opposite to the foot of the bed ; and the well-known words flashed into her darkened heart like a ray of sunshine,—“ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Faith rose from her knees, and her hopeless, troubled look gradually passed away. That text was found in half-defaced letters on an ancient tomb in Marksbourne Church,—the tomb of a knight who lay sleeping peacefully with hands crossed upon his breast, and the soft colours from the high-arched chancel windows falling around him. She had loved in her childhood to look upon the still marble figure, and had wondered and speculated about it in a silent fashion, until Mr. Brixton had shown her the words, and helped her to decipher them. He had talked to her, not so much of the knight’s history—for that was buried in oblivion—as of the history of every true soldier of Christ who had vowed “ manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil.” He spoke of those enemies who always beset the Christian’s path, and of the snares which were spread for him on every side ; and he told her, too, how his worst foes were the traitors within his own bosom,—the evil thoughts, and the doubts and misgivings, which, if he yielded to them, would render his arm weak and powerless to wield the sword. And then he had described to her the never-ceasing love and watchfulness of the great Captain for every soldier in His army ; how He was ever at hand to help those that

were ready to fall, if they called upon Him in their time of need. And he had made her clearly understand that in this great warfare there was no neutral ground,—no space where one might stand to watch the contending forces as a mere spectator, for he who was not on the Lord's side was against Him—fighting with the devil and his angels. And when he had pictured to her the hardships of the conflict, he went on to speak of the eternal rest that lay beyond the strife; of the song of triumph, and the crown of victory. From that time Faith had ceased to indulge in vague dreams and fancies about the marble knight, but rather chose to look upon him as a type of God's warrior whose work was done, and who was waiting calmly until the morning of the resurrection. And then she had illuminated the text in letters of scarlet and blue and gold, that it might be always before her eyes in her own room. "I must endure to the end," she said softly to herself. "I must be faithful unto death. It is only for a little while—this striving and fighting,—and then there will be the everlasting peace."

She smoothed her hair, washed away the traces of her tears, and went quietly into her sister's chamber again, to renew their broken talk. But as the door opened, Violet sprang up from the silks and laces, and came anxiously towards her.

"Oh, Faith, you have been getting into a scrape with papa! I heard him storming at you. What was it about, dear?"

"Rollo followed me into the breakfast-room and growled at Sir Oscar's dog;—there would have been

a fight if I hadn't coaxed him away; and papa was very angry."

"Was that all?"

"Not quite; he was displeased at something in my manner to Sir Oscar."

"Ah, I thought that was at the bottom of it. It's a sad pity;—how pale and sorrowful you look, Faith!"

"My head aches, and if you don't want me after luncheon, Violet, I think I'll take a walk to Netley's cottage."

"Do go; you'll feel all the better for it. I shall be writing letters until dinner-time."

"Yes, and I'll carry one of Sir Oscar's birds to poor Mrs. Netley," said Faith, brightening with the idea. "Her appetite is very bad, and perhaps a plump partridge may tempt her to eat."

The remainder of the morning was spent over the *trousseau*, until the luncheon-bell summoned them downstairs, where they found the colonel in that morose humour which always followed a violent outbreak of temper. There was a gloom over all three while they sat at the table, for even Violet was awed and frightened by her father's forbidding aspect; so that the meal passed over in silence.

When she was once more at liberty, Faith put on her walking dress; and having deposited the partridge and a mould of calves' feet jelly in a basket, sallied forth, attended by Rollo, on her way to Netley's cottage.



CHAPTER IX.

THE NETLEYS.



NDREW NETLEY'S cottage was situated on the outskirts of Sir Oscar Northwood's covers, and the squire looked upon him with no favouring eye. If the said cottage had been the property

of the baronet, Netley would not have been suffered to remain in it another day; but it stood just within the boundaries of Mr. Hazelhurst's land, and Mr. Hazelhurst did not choose to turn out his tenant. Some four or five years before the date of my story, Netley had been strongly suspected of implication in a serious poaching affray; but the charge was not substantially proved against him, and the magistrates dismissed him with a caution. From that time Sir Oscar had cherished a grudge against the man, and this was increased by the impossibility of removing him from his little domicile. And then, too, he fancied that Andrew's bearing towards him, although scrupulously respectful, was not unmixed with a spice of secret triumph.

But the baronet's animosity was both unjust and unreasonable; for Andrew Netley had long ago repented heartily of those misdeeds into which he had been led by evil companions. Mr. Brixton believed the man to be sincerely penitent, and did all in his power to help him in earning an honest livelihood. But, unfortunately, poor Andrew had sustained an injury to the knee which caused an incurable lameness. The rector had freely spent money to obtain for him the best advice and surgical skill, but all in vain; and Netley had to support himself and his sick wife by doing any light work which came in his way. Mrs. Netley had been for some years a cripple from chronic rheumatism; and of all the poor people in the parish, Faith loved her the best. The sweet patience with which she bore her burden of constant pain and helplessness was a beautiful example; and Mr. Brixton was wont to say that he

had learned many a useful lesson in that humble cottage.

The "golden days" of which Faith had spoken had not set in yet. The trees kept all the glory of their summer garb, and although the lavish bloom of the flowers was past, the garden beds were still bright with flashes of rich colour. The mountain-ash showed clusters of coral berries, and the brier bush flaunted its glistening scarlet fruit. There were thick spots of amethyst heather on the roadside banks, over which the brown bees and butterflies hummed and fluttered; but as yet the year betrayed no tokens of decay.

Rollo, happily unconscious of the storm he had raised in the earlier part of the day, kept up a steady trot by his mistress's side, and carried her basket carefully in his mouth. To Faith the bright sunshine and soft fragrant air brought infinite comfort and relief; and she walked with the light, firm step and erect carriage which had been peculiar to her from childhood. Now, too, the rich blood had returned to her clear brown cheeks,—there was an unconscious smile on her full red lips, and a tender lustre in her dark eyes. Her straw hat with its small bouquet of poppies and corn-flowers, and airy veil of black lace, sat gracefully upon the head and glossy coils of ebon hair; and she was altogether a different being from the pale stern-faced girl who had gone so unwillingly that morning to receive an unwelcome visitor.

Netley's cottage—a thatched, low-roofed dwelling, with yellow walls and tiny latticed windows—stood enclosed in a small piece of garden ground, and was

only separated from Sir Oscar's covers by a narrow footway. A huge walnut tree shaded it in front, and the trim flower beds and borders showed signs of care and neatness. The door was on the latch, and Faith and Rollo, having traversed the little path, entered without further ceremony.

"I'm so glad to see you, Miss," said a soft voice from the chimney corner; and Mrs. Netley's faded face brightened as she spoke. Faith shook hands with her, and Rollo, wagging his great tail, deposited the basket at her feet.

"He knows that there's something for you in it, Mrs. Netley. He has carried it very carefully all the way from home."

"He's as sensible as a Christian. Please, Miss, take that chair. I like to look at you while you talk, if you've no objection."

Faith smiled as she took her seat at the opposite corner of the fireplace.

The interior of the cottage was as picturesque as the outside. The walls were covered with a gay paper, a little the worse for wear; there was a fair show of crockery on the dresser, and the brick floor was scrupulously clean. The low ceiling was supported by a heavy wooden beam, and two stout iron hooks driven into it, held the gun which had so nearly involved its owner in serious mischief in years gone by. One side of the room was occupied by a four-post bedstead with curtains of faded chintz, for Mrs. Netley's infirmity prevented her from ascending the stairs which led to the upper chamber.

"You're very good to me, Miss Faith," said the poor woman, affectionately. "I get a little downcast sometimes, and whenever that happens to be my case, either you or the rector are sure to look in and cheer me up."

"The 'cheering up' isn't all on one side, Mrs. Netley; you don't know how often I have benefited by your example of fortitude and patience. And I think that must be your special mission, to set us a pattern of Christian endurance."

Mrs. Netley's mild eyes sought the speaker's face with a wistful look. More than once of late she had detected something in the young lady's tone which seemed to indicate that all was not going smoothly with her. It is often hard for the poor to understand that the rich can have any but imaginary troubles; they think that those who have "food and raiment" ought to "be therewith content." But there was in this woman an innate sensitiveness for others which enabled her to comprehend the more subtle sorrows of those in a higher rank of life. She knew, too, that it must be a real and heavy trial that could weigh down Faith's buoyant spirit.

"I always believe, Miss," she said, quietly, "that we women are specially called upon to endure. It's just the work which God has given us to do for Him; and sometimes it doesn't seem like work at all, but only waiting,—waiting for light. May be it's the hardest kind of work after all, but He knows best. 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"Isn't it a long night to you, Mrs. Netley? You are never free from pain, and you are always helpless too.

Don't you look back sometimes to the days when you were well and strong?"

"I do look back to those days, Miss Faith, but I don't want to live them again; they are over and done with, and they had their sorrows too. I'm not saying that I shouldn't be glad to get back some of the old strength and ease; and yet I'd rather have an aching body than an aching heart."

"And your heart doesn't ache now?"

"Very seldom;—never as it used in my youth. I was passionate when I was young, and impatient too. I wanted to have everything my own way. And I was proud of being a smart, active girl, and a brisk house-wife. So you see, Miss, that the very things on which I prided myself, my smartness and activity, are taken away. And yet my heart is at rest."

Faith wondered how it could be. And she wondered, too, if such calm repose of mind would ever have come to her if she had been in Mrs. Netley's place. The idea of being confined to one room,—never taking a step across the floor without crutches,—never going to church, nor even into the road outside the cottage door, was intolerable to her. And then there was the wearying pain to be borne, sometimes becoming such agony that the poor swollen limbs could scarcely bear the lightest touch. And as if this were not enough, there was the difficulty of getting the common necessities of life,—daily food, and fuel for winter use. Yet Mrs. Netley could say, "My heart is at rest."

Andrew's halting footstep was heard without, and in another moment he stood within the room. Rollo rose

up from his mistress's side to greet him in canine fashion, for Netley and the dog thoroughly understood each other. And Faith had a smile ready for him, for she liked the man, and respected him for his tenderness towards his invalid wife. He was tall and powerfully made, with a handsome bronzed face, frank dark eyes, and grizzled hair and whiskers. He had already passed his sixtieth year, but in spite of trials and privations he retained much of the fire and vigour of youth ; and there was in his aspect such a blending of strength and gentleness that even strangers were generally favourably impressed by him. Yet this was the man against whom Sir Oscar nourished a dislike which almost amounted to hatred.



CHAPTER X.

AN OLD FRIEND.



“VE brought a partridge for your wife, Netley,” said Faith. “I know you are a capital cook and you’ll dress it for her, won’t you ?”

“That I will, Miss,” he replied, taking the bird in his hand. “Did this come from Sir Oscar’s covers, Miss, if I may make so bold as to ask the question ?”

“Yes ; he brought a couple of brace to our house this morning.”

“And little enough he thought that one of ‘em would find its way into my cottage,” said Netley, with a sparkle of fun in his eyes. “It’s rather a dangerous meal to cook before a poor man’s fire, Miss.”

“Not dangerous when honestly obtained,” rejoined Faith, smiling. “But if I were the squire, Netley, you should all have as much game as you liked.”

"You've been better to my wife and me than fifty squires," exclaimed the man, heartily. "But I don't want Sir Oscar's game, Miss; and what surprises me is that a rich gentleman like him should be so dead set against a poor fellow like me."

"There, never mind it, Netley, let the matter rest," gently interposed his wife. And Faith, knowing that this old grievance was a standard topic of conversation with Andrew, and having many times listened to all he had to say on the matter, rose to take her departure. She bade good-bye to Mrs. Netley, placed the jelly upon the table within her reach, and went out, respectfully attended by Andrew to the garden gate.

The day was beginning to wane, and soft crimson clouds, touched here and there with pale gold, were blending with the pure blue of the sky. There was a tender light over all the landscape; a faint purple haze enfolded the hills, and the air was so still that scarce a breath stirred the thick foliage of Sir Oscar's woods.

Faith walked on, musing over her own shortcomings and Mrs. Netley's excellences, until a turn in the road brought her in sight of the rector of Marksbourne, who had just crossed a stile and stepped into the path before her. Instantly a glow of light and colour flashed into her face as he came at once to her side. She had been wont to meet him with that same radiant look years ago, when he was the curate and she was a little girl under the care of aunt Dorcas. In those early days Faith had instinctively recognised in Mr. Brixton "a kindred spirit;" and although that familiar phrase has been sadly

hackneyed and misused, it yet contains a fund of deep meaning. For it is this mysterious kinship of souls which creates the highest and purest kind of enjoyment that can be known on earth, and affords us, even in this life, a faint glimpse of that perfect "communion of saints" which is reserved for us in the life everlasting.

The first greetings which passed between them were few and brief; their friendship was of such old standing, and their mutual acquaintance so thorough, that there was no need for mere prefatory chit-chat before the real business of conversation began. And Faith, according to her usual fashion when the rector was her companion, at once laid open to him the subject that was uppermost in her mind.

"I have been to Netley's cottage, Mr. Brixton, learning some of the old lessons there, and thinking over them as I came along."

"Did you stand especially in need of those lessons to-day?"

"Indeed I did. And Mrs. Netley is an admirable teacher."

"What has she been teaching you, Miss Faith?"

"Mainly the lesson of endurance. She thinks that endurance is often the special work which God gives us women to do for Him; and I am sure it's quite true."

"But don't you think that we men have to take our share of endurance also?" asked the clergyman, with a quiet smile.

"Yes, sometimes. However, I believe that we have the greater need of patience. You can forget—or, at least, mitigate your troubles in the stirring business of

an active life; whereas we can do nothing but just sit still and endure; and that, as Mrs. Netley says, is the hardest work of all."

"You haven't tried our kind of work, Miss Faith; and you can't possibly judge from your point of view of our hardships and temptations. Perhaps, if you could take my place for a time, and be in the thick of the conflict, you'd be glad to get back to your old work of sitting still."

"I don't think so, Mr. Brixton. I'd rather a thousand times have been Ulysses, struggling and fighting and getting shipwrecked, and meeting with perils that seemed endless, than have waited in Ithaca like poor Penelope, pestered by those hateful suitors, and working, working at the tapestry which she never meant to finish. Wouldn't you?"

The rector laughed outright, a clear, genial laugh which was pleasant to hear.

"We may not choose our own lot," he said, when his mouth had settled into its usual grave lines; "and if we could, I doubt if we should be satisfied with it. The chief thing is 'to do our duty in that state of life into which it hath pleased God to call us.' The faithful servant shall in no wise lose his reward. Even in the old Greek story, you remember that Penelope's troubles had a happy ending. But sometimes the happy ending doesn't come in this life; and that, perhaps, is the worst thing about novels in general,—they teach the young to expect that virtue will always be rewarded and vice punished in this present world."

"It seems hard that it shouldn't be so," remarked Faith.

“I know that it does; but then we must recollect that our present existence is in fact only the first page of our history; the rest of the volume will be read by and by, and then it will be seen that there was no injustice done to the chief character because his wrongs were not righted in that first page.”

They walked on in silence for some paces, until they came to another turning, which led off from the main road into a narrow woody lane. And here the rector stopped suddenly.

“I should like to have walked home with you, Miss Faith,” he said, extending his hand, “but I must go down here to see poor old Miles. We shall meet on Thursday, of course, at your sister’s wedding breakfast.”

Faith’s bright face grew cloudy. She had been debating within herself whether or no she should tell Mr. Brixton about her own special trial. She had always been accustomed to confide her earlier sorrows to him, but now that she had grown up into womanhood their respective positions were not precisely the same. And then, too—as she reflected sadly,—it was easier to speak of the griefs of the child than of the troubles of the woman. Yet at that moment it seemed so exceedingly hard to bear the full weight of her cross alone, that she had much ado to keep back the tears.

“Good-bye,” she said, quietly, giving him her hand.

“Why, what ails you, my child?”

The question was put quickly and in an altered tone.

“Oh, Mr. Brixton, I wish I were a little girl again! I have a heavy burden to carry, and sometimes I think that it will break my spirit.”

"Can you tell me what it is?"

"I don't know how to do so; and yet I wish you knew it."

"Well, there's one thing I can do for you, even if I cannot soothe your sorrow, and I need not say what that is. But I am so grieved for you, my poor child! I thought you had been thoroughly enjoying your life. Those London seasons are what most young folks delight in."

"I detested them," said Faith, with sudden energy; "one week in Marksbourne is better than a year in London. But now the cloud has followed me home."

"Cheer up! there may be a bright light behind it."

The rector's voice and smile were full of encouragement, and Faith began to take heart. She parted with him and wended her way home, feeling all the better for that talk with her old friend and counsellor. So Rollo went round to his house near the stables, well satisfied with his ramble; and his mistress repaired to her own room, in improved spirits, to dress for dinner.



CHAPTER XI.

THE SQUIRE OF MARKSBURNE.



O you feel as if you could pick a bit of that partridge, missus?" asked Andrew Netley of his wife. She was feeling weaker than usual; it had been one of her "dark days," as she phrased it, and the wearisome pain had left her faint and exhausted.

"Yes, Netley, I think I'll try to eat; I'm a little easier now."

It was the evening of the day which followed Faith's visit. The little cottage room looked neat and cosy, as usual. The door was shut now, and a lighted candle stood upon the table, for it was eight o'clock. Andrew rose from his seat, and laying aside his pipe, bestirred himself with hearty good-will, and went rattling about among the cooking utensils. The bird had already been plucked, and after trussing it, he fastened a piece of string to an iron hook fixed into





the chimney-piece, and thus suspended the delicate morsel in front of the fire.

“Miss Faith is very good to me,” said Mrs. Netley, as she watched her husband’s proceedings. “I do hope and pray that she may have a happy life,” she added, musingly; “she’s got her trials, I’m afraid.”

“Brigham—he’s the head gardener at the abbey, missus—told John Stone ‘twas his belief the squire was after Miss Faith.”

“But it takes two to make a bargain, Netley; and Miss Faith isn’t one to be easily caught.”

“She won’t be a happy woman if she marries Sir Oscar,” remarked Andrew, who never had a good word to say for the squire. “He’s no friend to the poor, that he isn’t; and he’d just break her heart with his evil temper.”

“Well, well, don’t say hard things of him,” said the wife, softly. “And as to Miss Faith—bless her heart,—there’s One above who will look after her.”

The partridge was beginning to smell savoury; and Andrew, his face red with stooping over the fire, was carefully basting it, when the sound of footsteps approaching the door made him pause. Then there was a sharp knock, and he went to withdraw the bolt, still holding the basting-spoon in his hand.

A tall dark figure was standing on the threshold, and a stern voice said abruptly, “I want to have a word with you, Netley.”

Andrew knew the tones at once. “Come in, Sir Oscar,” he replied civilly, and he held the door wide open that the squire might enter. The unexpected visitor strode into the little room, scarcely deigning to

respond to Mrs. Netley's respectful salutation ; and his first glance fell upon the half-roasted bird.

" You rascal ! " he broke out furiously. " I always believed you were in league with a gang of poachers, and now I've positive proof of it ! I'll have you transported, I swear I will ! "

A dark flush of anger dyed Netley's face, but he kept down his just indignation by a mighty effort.

" You're mistaken, Sir Oscar," he began, in a quiet tone ; but the other roughly interrupted him.

" I suppose you'll tell me I can't believe my own eyes ! " he cried, scornfully. " Perhaps you'll say that's a leg of mutton roasting before your fire, and not one of my partridges."

" No, Sir Oscar, I shan't tell no lies," replied Andrew, sturdily. " It be a partridge sure enough ; but it was a free gift to my missus yonder."

" I'll have you convicted as a receiver of stolen goods," said the excited squire.

" You can't do that, Sir Oscar, 'cause it weren't stolen. Miss Faith Harrowby brought it to my missus, her own self."

" I don't believe you," returned the baronet. " Your trumped-up stories won't go down with me. Young ladies who are charitably disposed give away gruel and beef tea, and that sort of thing, not partridges."

" You've got no right, Sir Oscar, to come here insulting me, even though I *am* a poor man," said Andrew, beginning to lose self-command. " I'm speaking the plain truth, and if you don't believe me, I'll take the liberty of telling you to walk out of my cottage ! "

"Oh, don't, Netley!" moaned his wife, who was quaking in every limb.

But her pleading voice was drowned by a volley of oaths from Sir Oscar. She sank back in her chair, shuddering and hiding her face, while the baronet raged and stamped like one possessed.

"I won't put up with this," cried Netley, stepping close up to the squire. "I won't have my wife frightened to death with your bad language. Come, sir, I've told you the truth about the bird, and I can't say no more. So, now, there's the door."

Something in the expression of Andrew's eyes warned Sir Oscar not to provoke him farther. His own figure, although well formed enough, was no match for the man's powerful frame, and he did not care to hazard a struggle. He turned towards the door, muttering, "You'll repent this," and left the cottage as suddenly as he had entered it.

Andrew closed and bolted the door behind him, and then addressed himself to the task of soothing his poor wife, who was making great efforts to suppress her hysterical sobs. Mrs. Netley's nerves were weakened by long-continued pain and ill-health, and the squire's outburst of wrath had terrified her exceedingly. She had dreaded too, knowing her husband's high spirit, lest angry words might lead to blows, and then she shuddered to think of the consequences of such a fray.

"Don't take on so, missus," said Netley, tenderly; "there's no harm done, you know. We've got the right on our side."

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, "but he frightened me with his violence. Never mind me, I shall soon be better."

"I wish I'd given him a tap over the head with this here iron spoon!" exclaimed Andrew, his indignation rising again.

"Thank God you didn't! Oh, Netley, promise me that if ever you've the chance of doing that man a good turn, you'll do it!"

"That's too hard, missus. The most I can promise 'll be to let him alone; and I knows *that* won't be easy."

His wife was calm now, although her pale face and trembling hands bore witness to the shock she had received. Her voice was steady and very gentle when she spoke again.

"Husband," she said, "won't you try to overcome evil with good? It's the only way in which evil ever can be overcome. It's no use fighting against evil with evil weapons; you may cut it down for a time, but it would be sure to come up again. And if you give good deeds for hard words, you'll soon find out what strength they bring you."

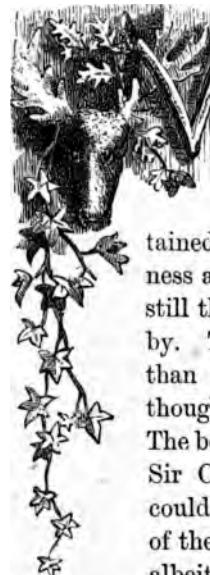
"But, missus, I don't see what I could do to serve the squire, even if I wanted to do him a good turn."

"Your time may come, Netley, and when it does, remember who said, 'Do good unto them which despitefully use you.' Let us pray for Sir Oscar to-night; we'll ask God to take away his heart of stone, and give him a heart of flesh."

Andrew listened gravely, turning the words over and over in his mind. A clean cloth was spread upon the little round table, and the partridge was served up in excellent style; but Mrs. Netley's appetite was not equal to the occasion.

CHAPTER XII.

VIOLET'S WEDDING.



VOLET stood before the looking-glass clad in her snowy bridal garments, and Faith and Eliza, one on either side, put the finishing touches to her attire. She was a very lovely bride, her fair face retained its old childlike expression of sweetness and simplicity, and in character she was still the timid, confiding Violet of days gone by. To-day her cheeks were a shade paler than usual, and she looked, as her sister thought, like a lily in her rich white dress. The bouquets had been sent, as promised, from Sir Oscar's conservatories, and even Faith could not repress her admiration at the sight of them. She was to be the only bridesmaid, albeit a large party of friends, young and old, were invited to witness the ceremony, and to be present at the breakfast.

The sisters wisely forbore to touch upon their approaching separation; for Violet's tears were very near

the brim, and Faith scarcely dared to trust her voice. So the fair bride swept down the stairs, leaning on her father's arm, and passed through the little throng of admiring servants, almost in silence. Faith followed in another carriage with Aunt Dorcas, and the well-known drive along the country road to church seemed but as part of a strange dream. The old lady spoke little as the carriage rolled along, but she held her niece's small white-gloved hand firmly in her own, and understood quite well what was passing in her heart. But when at length they came in sight of the grand old church, the bridesmaid drew her breath quickly to keep down a sob. Within those walls, she and Violet had knelt side by side at their confirmation, and there they had commemorated the Saviour's dying love. It was strange that at such a time as this, the past should seem more real to her than the present, and yet as she walked quietly up the stately aisle, and lifted her eyes to the glories of the east window, she was thinking chiefly of those old days. The rector's voice, reading the opening words of the solemn service, broke the spell, and she began to watch the bride with an anxious look. She saw how the flowers trembled in Violet's bouquet, and how faint lines of softly coloured light slanted downwards on her trailing white garments. It was soon over,—Violet Harrowby and Charles Redwyn were made one, and then there were the customary adjournment to the vestry, the usual congratulations, and the signing of the register with unsteady fingers. After that, the bridal party passed down to the west door, while flowers were strewn before the bride's footsteps, and the organ pealed forth the Wedding March.

Then came the wedding breakfast, with its trying ordeal of speeches ; and the chief actors on the occasion rejoiced when it came to an end. The bride and bridegroom had wisely arranged to take their departure early, and the real trial of parting was got over quickly by the sisters, up-stairs. In the presence of the guests no tears were shed either by Faith or Violet ; and only the rector caught the look in Faith's face when the carriage drove away. It was a look that touched him to the heart.

She made her way to aunt Dorcas's side, and as the guests were chatting sociably among themselves, she was permitted to have a few quiet moments. Only a very few, however, for an incident occurred which effectually roused her from her musings, and forced her to bestir herself.

Sir Oscar Northwood, Mr. Hazelhurst, and another gentleman were standing in a little group near her seat, talking to Colonel Harrowby, and occasionally a word or two of their conversation reached her ears, although she gave small heed to what they were saying. At last, the tone of Sir Oscar's voice, speaking almost excitedly, caught and fixed her attention.

"These poaching fellows must be kept down," he said ; "and I'll tell you, Hazelhurst, who is the coolest hand among them, and that's the rascal Netley, who lives in one of your cottages."

"I can scarcely think it," answered Mr. Hazelhurst ; "he's a civil, industrious fellow, and lame too ! I fancy you're mistaken."

"Mistaken!" echoed Sir Oscar. "Well, you shall hear how I caught him out. I went to his cottage last

night to ask him a few questions. I've always been sure he must hear something of the poachers as he lives so near the covers, and secretly I believed him to be in league with them, although I had no actual proof of the fact. He seemed awfully taken aback when he opened the door to me ; and that arrant hypocrite, his wife, saluted me in an obsequious manner as I came in. And what do you suppose was roasting before his fire ? Why, as I live, there was a plump partridge !"

"Scandalous !" exclaimed the colonel, who was a strong advocate for keeping down the lower classes.

"But how did he come by it ?" asked the more temperate Hazelhurst.

"He owned that it came from my covers," Sir Oscar replied, and he told me a cock-and-bull story of its being given to his wife by Miss Faith Harrowby——"

Faith prevented the conclusion of the sentence by coming forward, and standing before the speaker.

"Netley told you the truth, Sir Oscar," she said, quietly. "I carried one of those birds which you brought me, to his wife, hoping that it might tempt her to eat. And you must pardon me for saying that she is no hypocrite."

"But, Miss Faith," rejoined the baronet, softening his voice when he spoke to her, "don't you think it likely that these people are too deep for you ? You are so unsuspecting that I fear your good nature is often imposed upon."

"You must have a very bad opinion of my penetration," Faith said, with a smile. "But I can assure you that I have known the Netleys for a long time, and have proved them to be honest and trustworthy."

"Pshaw, Faith!" put in the colonel, impatiently. "You are not up to the tricks of the lower orders. And I greatly disapprove of your feeding them with dainties; it's a bad system, and won't answer at all."

"Surely, colonel," interposed the rector, good-humouredly, "you don't object to an occasional dainty being given to a sick woman."

"But these sort of folks, rector, are always shamming;—it's their way," said the colonel.

"Pardon me," returned Mr. Brixton, in a more decided manner, "it is my business as a clergyman to go about among them; and I am bound to say I find but little shamming. Patience, courage, and endurance I *do* find, and I have seldom seen a better example of Christian fortitude than manifested by Mrs. Netley."

Colonel Harrowby was silent, and then the conversation took another turn. But Sir Oscar sought Faith's side, and strove to do away with the unfavourable impression he had made. The rector, quietly using his eyes, discovered many things that morning, and amongst other matters, he found out what that trouble was which Faith could not tell him.





CHAPTER XIII.

SIR OSCAR'S INTENTIONS.



OLONEL HARROWBY had insisted that his daughter's wedding day should be brought to a close by a ball, to which all the county families were invited.

It was weary work, however, and before the festivities were half over, Faith found herself longing ardently for a few quiet hours of rest and solitude. It was, moreover, a great annoyance to find that Sir Oscar managed to keep close by her side, despite her efforts to free herself from his society. And the guests were not slow in remarking his attentions, and in commenting on them among themselves. The baronet was fully aware that his manner of speaking of the Netleys had not raised him in Faith's estimation, and he now strove steadfastly to gain her good opinion by every means in his power.

"You were angry with me this morning, Miss Faith," he said, gently, when he found an opportunity of speaking to her apart. "You may be sure I did not know that those Netleys were *protégés* of yours, or I would have let them alone if they had left my covers bare."

"That wouldn't have pleased me, Sir Oscar," Faith answered, simply; "if a man is a poacher he deserves punishment. But I think you have misjudged Andrew Netley."

"Perhaps I have. I have often thought of late that I ought to take more interest in the poor people of Marksbourne. Can't you teach me to understand them better, and to be of use to them, Miss Faith?"

"The rector will tell you exactly what is needed," she replied. "He is intimately acquainted with all their requirements, and I know he will be heartily glad of your aid."

"Oh, I don't care about working with clergymen!"

They are so insufferably conceited," exclaimed Sir Oscar, his natural temper getting the mastery over his desire to please.

"What's that about clergymen?" asked Ada Hazelhurst, coming up at the moment. "We know you don't like them, Sir Oscar, for we never see you inside a church."

Faith gladly took the opportunity to move off in another direction; and at length the ball, so wearisome to her, came to a close. She was free then to seek her own chamber, to strip off her jewels, and take the rest for which she had longed. But before she laid her head on the pillow she knelt and prayed earnestly for strength to tread the difficult path which lay before her. She asked that light from above might shine upon the rugged road to make the way plain. And then, rising from her knees, she looked up again at the text upon the wall, and went to sleep with those words upon her lips,—

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Sir Oscar Northwood left Colonel Harrowby's house fuming with rage. He was always, as he told himself, making false steps, and losing ground with Faith, instead of gaining it. His unreasonable hatred of Andrew Netley was doubled and trebled now,—the Netleys would doubtless give their own version of the partridge story to their benefactress, and she would dislike him for his unjustifiable conduct towards those who had no means of retaliation. Sir Oscar's life had been an unbroken stream of prosperity, he had never known what it was to have a desire thwarted or a com-

mand disobeyed ; and parents, guardians, tutors, and servants, had all combined to spoil him. He was left fatherless at the age of fourteen, and very soon he succeeded in getting the upper hand of his gentle, feeble-minded mother, who died a few years later. And then came a desultory, irregular course of education, for the boy ran away from school, and contrived fairly “to get the bit between his teeth,” as the old coachman was wont to say of him. His mother’s maiden sister, Lady Harriet Churton, came down to Marksbourne Abbey to preside over her nephew’s establishment, and keep the wild young baronet himself in check, as far as she was able. She played her part with considerable skill, and as years passed on, Sir Oscar might be said to have settled down. But the ungovernable temper, the frantic impatience of restraint, and selfish determination to gratify his own desires at any cost,—these characteristics remained unchanged in him. Good influence and careful training might have done much to eradicate his faults, but I scarcely think that the wisest tuition in the world could have made him an amiable or a lovable man. His utter contempt of religion scandalized even Lady Harriet, who was not herself over-particular in such matters. She generally ordered the carriage and drove to church once on a Sunday in fine weather, but if the day chanced to be too hot or too cold, or if the clouds threatened rain, she made a point of remaining at home. But she would have preferred that her nephew should sometimes accompany her instead of spending his Sunday mornings in reading the newspapers, or idling away the time with his horses

and dogs. She was not present at Violet's wedding, neither did she attend the ball which followed it, for a slight cold had confined her to the house. But she had sent her congratulations and a graceful present to the bride, and she began to question Sir Oscar about the festivities, when they sat together at lunch on the following day.

"And how did the ball go off, Oscar?" she asked, as she contemplated her nephew's moody face.

"Just the same as any other ball," he answered.

"But who were there?"

"Oh, all the county,—too many people for the rooms,—a great crush."

"Ah, that was a mistake. And was Faith Harrowby looking her best? That girl requires careful dressing, with her dark complexion, but I must do her the justice to say that she really gets herself up very creditably."

"She looked very well. But the fact is that she's spoiled,—absolutely spoiled! She's got into the habit of poking about among the cottages like a Methodist. Besides the absurdity of the thing, she is constantly getting deceived; she listens to the cant of a pack of poachers and their wives, and is led to believe the most preposterous nonsense. It's a pity,—a very great pity!"

"There must have been something defective in her education," said Lady Harriet. "Her father was abroad in India for many years; who had the care of her?"

"That old lady, Miss Harrowby. She must have let the girl have her own way completely," replied Sir Oscar, musingly, "and that's about the worst thing in the world for a woman."

An amused smile rippled across Lady Harriet's well-preserved face for a moment; it was something new to hear Sir Oscar moralize, and she felt half disposed to ask him if having one's own way was bad only for women. But she saw that his temper was chafed, and wisely refrained from irritating him.

"She gives herself airs," he went on, after a pause, "and puts on a sort of superiority which doesn't suit me at all."

"She'd be all the better for a little good advice, I dare say. But you haven't said one word about the other girls who were there, Oscar."

"I don't believe I took much notice of them. The truth is, Aunt Harriet, that Faith Harrowby would please me very well indeed if she wasn't so awfully spoiled. And in short,—I——"

"Yes, Oscar, I perfectly understand," interposed Lady Harriet, coming to her nephew's assistance; "and I shouldn't think there would be any difficulty about the matter. Shall I invite her to stay with me? You may be sure that her father is your ally."

"Yes, that's a very good idea; and if we can get her here, you'll do your best to improve her, and talk her out of her absurdities."

"Very well," said Lady Harriet, "the thing shall be done." She was already growing tired of her life at Marksbourne Abbey. And as she had lately inherited an independent fortune, she was quite ready to set up an establishment of her own, and to resign her post to a new comer.



CHAPTER XIV.

TROUBLED WATERS.

THERE was daily need of all Faith's strength and patience, for Colonel Harrowby was terribly exacting and imperious; and now that Violet was gone, she had to bear the burden alone. A heavy burden it was, for the colonel

was in a chronic state of resentment; Faith's coldness to Sir Oscar Northwood was a perpetual source of irritation to him, and the more he encouraged the baronet's visits, so much the more did Faith discourage his attentions. In all other matters she was dutiful and obedient; the household affairs were well regulated, and all his peculiar tastes and fancies were scrupulously studied and gratified. Yet she got no credit for these things,—the colonel was ever on the watch for something to grumble at, and she found that, with all her care, he would not be pleased.

“Sir Oscar rode over here this afternoon,” he said to her, as they sat at dinner one evening. “You were out as usual,—you always do contrive to be out when it is my particular wish that you should be at home.”

“I had gone to see Aunt Dorcas, papa.”

“It doesn't matter where you were gone,—you ought to have been in the house when you were wanted. Sir Oscar brought a note for you from Lady Harriet. Have you read it yet?”

“No, papa; I have not had time to open it. You know I only came in, just before dinner.”

“You are always in a hurry,” growled the colonel. And then the dessert was placed upon the table, and the servants withdrew. “You can read your note now,” he said, as she helped herself to fruit. “You don't seem anxious to learn its contents.”

Faith left her fruit untasted, and obediently proceeded to open the delicate envelope which bore the stamp of a coronet. Her father closely scrutinized her face while her eyes were fixed on the tiny sheet of paper,

and he saw her dark brows contract once or twice as she read.

“Well?” he asked, eagerly, when she had laid it quietly beside her plate; “what do you say to it?”

“It is an invitation to stay at the Abbey, papa.”

“I know it is; and of course you will accept it, Faith.”

“I had rather not, papa.”

“But I have already accepted it for you; I told Sir Oscar you would go.”

Faith’s colour rose, and the old fire began to sparkle in her eyes, but she controlled herself, and answered quietly:

“I am sorry for that, papa; because I very much wish to decline.”

“And why should you wish to decline?” cried the colonel, becoming excited, “Why should you seek occasion to insult your father’s friends? Is that behaving like a dutiful daughter?”

She was silent.

“Come, Faith, I will have a reply. Why do you object to go to the Abbey?”

“Well, papa, I will answer you straightforwardly. I do not care about Lady Harriet Churton; I could not make a friend of her.”

“She is a very agreeable woman,” said the colonel; “there is no earthly reason why you should shun her acquaintance, saving that I wish you to cultivate it. It seems to me, Faith, that it is only for me to express a wish and you instantly oppose it.”

“Papa, I wish you wouldn’t say so. I really do strive to please you.”

"Only to a certain extent; but you are never willing to gratify me at the expense of your own inclinations."

There was a degree of cunning in this speech which was hard to deal with. He knew that Faith dared not give him her chief reason for shunning the Abbey and its inmates,—dared not admit to him that she was striving to ward off that declaration which she could see that Sir Oscar intended to make. Again she had recourse to silence.

"Now, Faith," he continued, pursuing his advantage, "I ask you just for once to yield your wishes to mine. Even if you don't like Lady Harriet, you might accept her invitation, to please your father."

"Dear papa, can't you ask me to do anything else?"

"No; surely, it is a very simple request, and it doesn't involve a great amount of self-sacrifice."

"Don't urge me, papa," she pleaded, desperately. "I don't want to go there,—indeed, I can't go."

She was answered, as she had expected, by a storm of passionate reproaches, during which she sat white and trembling. She felt then that she must give in, there was no help for it, and she waited until the colonel paused for breath, to say in a low unsteady tone:

"Very well, papa, I will obey you; but remember that I have done my utmost to escape this visit." And with these words she retreated from the room.

A sleepless night followed this stormy scene, and when Faith rose in the morning she felt that mind and body were severely taxed. She took her place at the breakfast-table with a pallid face and heavy eyes; but the colonel had the satisfaction of seeing a note addressed to

Lady Harriet given to the groom, who was bidden to ride over with it to the Abbey. He was kinder than usual to his daughter during the morning meal, but she seemed to be too weary and heart-sick to respond to his efforts at conversation. He began to fear that he had gone too far.

“ You had better take a ride this morning, Faith,” he said, in a softer tone than he generally used.

“ No thank you, papa, I prefer walking.”

Shortly afterwards she left the house, unattended this time by Rollo, and made her way into the turnpike road,—the same road which the wedding carriages had taken a fortnight before. It was another genial, quiet day, the landscape wore its softest colours, and the sky was calm and bright. All over hill and lowland there were delicate lights and varied shadows, and the faint tinkle of the sheep-bells came drifting down from the distant slopes. But Faith’s tears flowed fast as she walked along, for the peaceful aspect of the scene reminded her of the days when she had carried a lighter heart over that well-known road, and had loved to watch the mellow tints of September stealing over the old woods.

Two miles were traversed before she reached the church. She knew that the early morning service would be over before she got there, but her home-ties rendered it impossible for her to attend it. She had come with the intention of spending a little time alone in that sacred place; longing for the peace and quiet which reigned within its walls.

She found the west door left unfastened, and went in,

with noiseless steps, that awakened no echoes in the empty aisles. It was very still, and grand, and solemn ; the tall white arches were touched here and there with coloured light, and the marble floor of the chancel was strewn with shifting tints, like fragments of a rainbow. Faith walked straight up to the knight's tomb, and stood looking down at the quaint sculptured warrior, through her tears. She put out her hand and touched those cold stony hands, as she had often done in her childish days, and then she began to think about "the rest that remaineth to the people of God." When she had first put on the Christian's armour, resolving, with the Holy Spirit's aid, that she would be a faithful soldier of the Cross, she had not expected the strife would be so fierce. In the day of peace she had taken up the Christian's weapons, and should she lay them down in the day of battle ? Never ! while she had strength to use them ; never, until the Angel of Death came to tell her that the conflict was ended, and the victory won.

The tears that she wept now did her good ; and she was still standing by the tomb, her face hidden in her hands, when a voice pronounced her name ; and looking up, she saw Mr. Brixton.





CHAPTER XV.

“ IN THE NET.



“ Y poor child, what ails you ? ”

It was not easy to answer the question, and for some seconds Faith could find no voice to speak at all;

but at last, calming herself with a great effort, she said in a whisper,—

“Home trials.”

The rector's mind went back to the day when he had seen the same face looking pale and distressed with the burden of Margaret Holt's secret. He thought of the unselfish although mistaken firmness, with which Faith had stood her ground on that occasion ; and he remembered his old conviction that such a strong will would have strong trials. But how much easier it was for him to help and direct the child than to advise the woman !

“Is it impossible to speak of these trials, Miss Faith ?” he asked.

“I think I must speak of them now, Mr. Brixton ; I can't keep them to myself any longer.”

“Are they connected in any way with Sir Oscar Northwood ?”

“In every way,” Faith answered ; “he is the root of this evil.”

“But what brought you here to weep alone ?”

She told him the truth simply enough,—how she was to be forced into paying that hated visit to Marksbourne Abbey, and how intensely she dreaded its results.

“I don't see how you can help going there,” he said, after a pause ; “and as to the results,—you will have to meet them. You must be firm and steadfast ; the storm will pass over.”

“But it will be so terrible,” said Faith ; “and you do not know how determined papa is, Mr. Brixton.”

“You must not suffer anything to drive you into an

unsuitable marriage, Miss Faith. You have a battle to fight, but you know Who is on your side."

She did know that, and the thought brought her hope and comfort. They left the church and came into the quiet graveyard. The soft September air, sweet with the breath of the late roses which were planted around the graves, fanned their faces as they stood together at the gate."

"Good-bye, my child," said the rector; "do not be troubled about the future. The Lord will lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

So Faith went her way homeward again; and on the next day Lady Harriet drove over from the Abbey to fetch her guest.

Eliza had a grave face while she packed her young lady's box, for, accustomed as she had been to attend on Faith since her early girlhood, she could not help seeing that the visit was distasteful to her. Often in her heart of hearts Eliza had wished that the colonel had remained in India, and that Miss Faith had been left in the safe hands of Aunt Dorcas. It vexed her to see her dear mistress so sorely worried and distressed.

She was standing with the key in her hand when Faith entered the room to equip herself for the drive; and as their eyes met, each seemed to read the other's thoughts. Then breaking through her usual habits, Eliza spoke out with sudden earnestness.

"Dear Miss Faith, you'll be firm, won't you? You must forgive me for speaking so freely, but I do beg and pray of you never to be talked into marrying Sir Oscar!"

"You don't like him, Eliza?" said Faith, inquiringly.

"Like him ! No Miss Faith, that's impossible. And mark my words, he's got a spite against Andrew Netley, and he'll have him turned out of his cottage yet."

"I hope not, Eliza ; Mr. Hazelhurst owns that cottage, and he is favourably disposed towards the Netleys."

She tried hard to conquer the feeling of resentment against the colonel when he handed Lady Harriet and herself to the carriage ; and she did her best to chat sociably with her companion as they drove on towards the abbey. But her task of self-control was no easy one, and there was a weight upon her spirit which she could not shake off.

The road led them past Netley's cottage, and there was Andrew himself at work in the little garden. He raised his head as the carriage rolled by, and his quick eye recognised Faith, even through her thick veil. His face darkened for an instant, but he saluted the ladies respectfully, and Faith nodded in her usual cordial manner. Lady Harriet, however, did not vouchsafe him any notice.

"That man is a poacher," she remarked, with an air of conviction.

"No, Lady Harriet, I am sure he is not ; I have known him for many years," said Faith, firmly.

Here was an opportunity for Sir Oscar's aunt to talk Faith out of those notions which were so objectionable to the baronet, and she seized it at once.

"My dear child," she began, affectionately, "I know how charitably disposed you are, and every one must admit that charity is a sweet womanly quality, but it should be kept within proper bounds. Now you really

should not visit those Netleys, they are bad people, and are linked in with a sadly low set."

"Supposing that they are bad people, Lady Harriet, is that a good reason why they should never be visited?"

"Of course, my dear, the rector or the curate can go and see them, and give them tracts, and that sort of thing. But there really is no reason why a young lady should deal with such dreadful persons."

Faith smiled. "You don't know the Netleys as I do," she said quietly. "But I can't quite agree with you in thinking that the clergy ought to do all the visiting work. And I believe that there are some of those 'dreadful people' who would shut up their hearts against a clergyman just because he comes to them in his official capacity, while they would open them to a woman who does not appear in the character of an authorized instructor. And surely it is only right to help God's ministers as much as we can; there is always a lack of labourers, although the harvest is plenteous."

Lady Harriet set Faith down as an unmanageable girl, but she held her peace.

The carriage rolled under the great gateway built of massive grey stone, and on into the Abbey grounds, until it drew up before the front entrance of the magnificent old pile. Until the reign of Henry VIII. Marksbourne Abbey had been occupied by a company of Cistercian monks, but this religious community shared the fate of others, and their place of abode having passed into the King's hands, was afterwards bestowed by him upon Sir Oscar Northwood's ancestors. The Abbey church had

perished long ago, but much of the original monastery remained ; there was still the dormitory, a long room divided into separate cells, which were now principally used as store-rooms ; and the refectory. There might also be seen the ancient chapter-house, enriched with curiously carved devices, and having a ceiling which was a marvel of quaint fretted stonework.

But Faith was in no mood to appreciate the antiquities of the Abbey that evening. When she went in to dinner, with her hand resting reluctantly upon Sir Oscar's arm, she felt as if the meshes of a net were being gathered closer and closer around her, and knew she must make a vigorous dash to break through them.





CHAPTER XVI.

FAITH BREAKS THE NET.

T dinner, Sir Oscar gave Faith a piece of information. He mentioned carelessly that he had purchased Netley's cottage of Mr. Hazelhurst.
“I thought that Mr. Hazelhurst had refused to sell it,” said Lady Harriet.

"So he did; but I've persuaded him to let me have it."

Faith listened, and held a debate within herself. She greatly disliked the idea of asking any favour of Sir Oscar, and yet she could not think without pain of poor Mrs. Netley being forced to leave the home she loved so well, and which had been hers ever since her marriage. She recalled all the little arrangements for his wife's comfort which Andrew had made with his own hands, and felt that in the poor woman's ailing condition it would indeed be an act of cruelty to remove her to another place. And she resolved to lay the matter before the baronet when she could obtain a fitting opportunity, and plead with him for her humble friends. In Lady Harriet's presence she determined not to open her lips on the subject.

It had been decided that Faith was to spend a week at the Abbey, and no amount of pressing could induce her to lengthen the term of her visit. She had arrived on Friday evening, and Saturday morning was spent in exploring all the most ancient portions of the house; she was shown those parts which had been occupied by the monks, and the antique beauty of the chapter-house interested and delighted her. Sir Oscar himself cared nothing at all for these matters, but he was not slow to affect an interest which he did not feel, in order to give Faith pleasure. He found that her cold manner thawed a little when he discoursed with her of the relics of bygone times, and he racked his brains to recall the old legends of the Abbey which he had heard from his father's lips. Then they repaired to the library, and he

made unwonted researches among the family papers to gain information respecting the early days of his ancient domicile. It was such a rare thing to see him taking the trouble to gratify any human being save himself, that Lady Harriet looked on in utter amazement, and decided that her nephew must be very much in earnest indeed.

But when Sunday morning came, the baronet brought his aunt's astonishment to a climax by stating his intention of going to church. And the open carriage with its superb pair of chestnuts drove away from the Abbey with Lady Harriet and Faith in it side by side, while Sir Oscar occupied the seat opposite to them. I think it was the most uncomfortable Sunday morning service that Faith had ever gone through. Prayers and psalms and lessons failed to awaken any feeling of devotion, and as far as she was concerned, the curate's sermon was preached to deaf ears. Strive as she would against the feeling, she could not divest herself of the wretched consciousness that the baronet was by her side, and that folks would put their own constructions on the fact. The net had been subtly woven, and the fine meshes encompassed her round about.

"How silly I am!" she said to herself as she went to her chamber on her return from church. "I'm a free English girl, and nobody can compel me to do anything against my will. But it is always hateful to be placed in a false position." And then she found herself wondering what Mr. Brixton had thought of Sir Oscar's appearance in the pew with her that day.

"*He* can't misunderstand it, that's certain," she re-

flected. "He knows that it was only to pacify papa that I came here at all."

Thursday evening came at last, and Faith congratulated herself that the dreaded ordeal was nearly over. Lady Harriet's maid dressed her hair before dinner, and while the girl's skilful fingers braided the heavy silken tresses, Faith's thoughts wandered to her own bedroom at home. There the old thoughts would come back to her, and she could read the old devotional books in peace and security. Her spirits rose, and her face brightened with the sense of coming freedom, and when her toilette was completed she went down with a light step into the drawing-room.

Sir Oscar was there alone. He stood at the window, half concealed by the light shadow of the muslin curtain, but he turned instantly when Faith entered.

"Come and look at the sky, Miss Faith," he said, "the sun has just gone down."

She crossed the room and stood beside him, watching the soft crimson glow flushing the western heavens. A low wind crept whispering through the shrubs, and stirred the clustering leaves of the Virginia creepers that festooned the window, but there was no other sound, the room was quite still.

Faith suddenly remembered the Netleys and their cottage. Here was a good opportunity for preferring her request to Sir Oscar.

"I have a favour to ask you," she began; "I want you to promise me, please, Sir Oscar, that you won't turn the Netleys out of their old home."

He did not immediately reply, and in the hush that

succeeded her words, she could hear him draw his breath quickly. Then he drew a step nearer to her side.

“ You shall do as you like with that cottage and everything else,” he answered, “ if you will give yourself to me.”

Faith trembled. She had hoped to escape this.

He took advantage of her silence to speak earnestly and with that eloquence which anxiety often gives. He set before her the power that he could put into her hands,—power to help the poor and sick, and to set on foot many schemes of usefulness. He pleaded for himself,—asking her to be to him the counsellor and companion he so sorely needed. And last of all, he told her that the colonel’s consent had already been willingly granted, and that in refusing hers, she was thwarting the strongest wish of her father’s life.

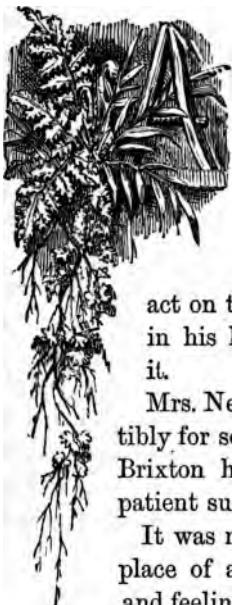
Before he had finished, Faith had grown calm and firm. Courteously, and as one who had a due sense of the honour done her, she spoke her quiet negative.

Lady Harriet’s entrance at the moment put a stop to anything more that the baronet might have intended to say. But she had done her best to make him understand that her answer was a final one; and it was with a sense of infinite relief that she felt she had broken through the net.



CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. NETLEY GOES HOME.



ANDREW NETLEY received a week's notice to quit his cottage. He was only a weekly tenant, as many of the Marksbourne peasants were, and Sir Oscar had taken advantage of this to compel him to leave his old home in seven days.

It was a cruel and an unjustifiable act on the baronet's part, but the power was in his hands and he did not scruple to use it.

Mrs. Netley's health had been failing perceptibly for some months, and both Faith and Mr. Brixton had felt convinced that her life of patient suffering was drawing near its close.

It was not easy for Andrew to find another place of abode in such a short space of time, and feeling that his poor wife was ill-fitted for a rough lodging, he went to the rector in his trouble, and consulted him as to what he should do. And the rector persuaded his gardener (who was a single man) to receive the Netleys for a while.

In the meantime, Faith's path did not lie among roses; for the colonel was enraged beyond measure at the failure of his hopes. His daughter at last, worn out with his reproaches, went to Aunt Dorcas and entreated her to come and reason with him. So Miss Harrowby presented herself one morning at her brother's house, and informed him that she intended to spend a few days under his roof. The colonel welcomed her, as in duty bound, although he strongly suspected her of conniving at Faith's obstinacy. They talked the affair over, calmly at first, and then the colonel's temper got the better of him, as it usually did, and he raved and stormed after his ordinary fashion. But Aunt Dorcas was a match for him, and she persisted in being heard. She set his conduct before him in its true colours, and succeeded in reducing him to silence. After her visit was over, he still continued harsh and gloomy, but there were no more violent outbreaks, and Faith was devoutly thankful for the comparative peace.

Sir Oscar was growing more and more unpopular among his poorer tenantry, and Eliza appeared to take pleasure in recounting to her mistress all the hard things that were said of him. Faith did her best to check these tales, but they only convinced her that she had been right in the step she had taken. She seldom saw anything of Lady Harriet Churton, and to her great relief, the baronet had never crossed her path since her visit to the **Abbey**.

One afternoon, somewhere about the end of October, Faith and Rollo set out on a visit to Mrs. Netley. Yellow leaves drifted about their footsteps, and the

autumn wind sighed mournfully through the faded trees. There was a grey sky flecked with silvery clouds, and the rooks flapped their sable wings over the brown and furrowed fields, breaking the stillness with their loud clamour. Thinking, as she often did, of summers past and gone, and musing a little over those lessons which the dying year never fails to teach, Faith walked on rapidly, folding her shawl closely round her, as the chill breeze came moaning by.

The gardener's cottage, wherein the Netleys were now lodged, stood close by the rectory grounds, and thither she directed her steps. She passed the church, which looked grey and solemn in the subdued light of that autumn day,—passed also the iron gates of the rectory, and caught a glimpse of the quaint, many-gabled house half hidden by trees. And then turning down into a shadowy lane, she stopped before a tiny thatched cottage, and knocked softly at the door.

It was opened by Andrew, whose face brightened at the sight of his visitor.

“Come in, Miss, come in,” he said, eagerly. “She’ll be glad enough to see you; poor thing, she has been hoping that you would call to-day.”

Faith followed him into a little prim parlour, and through a door leading to a small bedchamber. She stepped gently to the side of the bed, and drawing back the curtain, bent down over the pillow, while Andrew withdrew.

“So glad!” whispered Mrs. Netley’s weak voice, and the wasted hand held Faith’s in a feeble clasp.

“Are you much worse to-day?” Faith asked, tenderly.

“Not worse, Miss, only I feel that I’m drawing near home.”

“Don’t you think you will rally again yet, and stay with us a little longer?”

“No; you’re so good to me,—you and the rector,—but you can’t keep me here now. And I should be glad to go, Miss Faith, if it wasn’t for leaving my husband.”

“Dear Mrs. Netley, we won’t forsake him.”

“Thank you, Miss Faith. He’ll listen to you when I’m gone, and I want you to charge him to carry out my wish, I——”

Her breath failed when she spoke earnestly, and she paused to gain strength. Faith brought her some wine (for the rector had sent all necessary nourishments), and held the glass to her lips.

“You’ll tell Andrew, Miss,” she continued, “that he *must* forgive Sir Oscar. He’s terribly bitter against him now, and says it’s the squire’s fault that I’m dying. But anyhow, I shouldn’t have lived long, and oh! he *must* forgive him!”

“I’ll talk to him about it, Mrs. Netley. Don’t let that disturb your peace.”

“Tell him, Miss Faith, that if he ever loved his poor wife, he will do Sir Oscar a good turn for her sake. Tell him to watch for an opportunity of returning good for evil.”

“I will do so, I promise.”

“It may be only the fancy of a sick woman, and yet I believe that the opportunity *will* come. I think that somehow—I can’t tell in what way—Andrew may be of service to Sir Oscar.”

She was silent for a time, but her face wore a calmer look, and Faith knew that it had relieved her to speak as she had done.

"The light has come to me now, Miss Faith," she whispered, presently. "I waited for it long. And you'll be firm and patient, won't you? After all, it's only for a little while,—the weary waiting-time,—and then He shall wipe away all tears."

For an instant Faith could not reply, save by a pressure of the hand she held. And just then the rector quietly entered the room.

He greeted Faith with a few brief words, and turning to the dying woman, he spoke to her in a low tone. He said but a few sentences, but they brought a bright smile into her fading face; and he knelt by the bedside to repeat one or two of the old familiar prayers she loved so well. And when they were ended, Faith bent down to say good-bye.

"Good-bye," Mrs. Netley said, in a clearer voice than before; "God bless you, dear Miss Faith; good-bye."

She knew then, that she had seen Mrs. Netley for the last time, and she went out of the cottage with a full heart.

The shadowy lane was filled with the splendour of the sunset. The church walls glowed in the crimson light, and the west window glittered as if it had been set on fire. The tall spire stood bathed in glorious colour, pointing far upwards to the deep rose-tinted clouds; and all over the quiet graves lay the strangely solemn radiance. Faith stood still, and looked around through her tears.

Mr. Brixton came up the lane to her side, and they walked forwards some paces without uttering a word. Then they talked calmly of the mysteries of Life and Death, and of her who was nearing the very gates of Paradise.

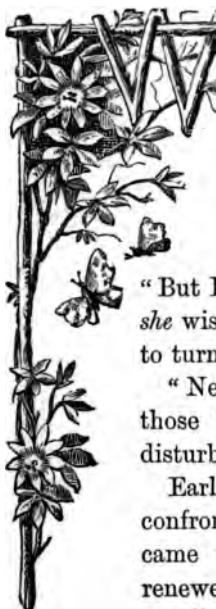
Homeward over the fast-darkening roads they went together, and did not part until they reached the gates of Colonel Harrowby's house. Then the rector retraced his steps, and Faith went indoors, feeling soothed and quieted.

And that morning, just at daybreak, Mrs. Netley died.



CHAPTER XVIII.

“FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.”



EEKS passed on, and Christmas was drawing near. Faith had not failed to tell Andrew of his wife's last injunctions to her, and he had solemnly promised to obey her wish if ever he had power to do so.

“Not that I think such a chance will come in my way, Miss,” he said.

“But I'll strive to forgive the squire, since *she* wished it. It was a cruel thing, though, to turn a dying woman out of her home.”

“Never mind, Andrew; she has gone to those ‘many mansions’ where none can disturb her peace.”

Early in December, Faith found herself confronted by an old trouble,—Sir Oscar came to Colonel Harrowby and formally renewed his suit.

All the former thorny path had to be traversed over again, and Faith began to grow utterly weary and heart-sick. The Colonel gave her no peace

now; day after day the storms of fury broke upon her head; and even Aunt Dorcas's influence ceased to be of any avail. It was a period of constant trial, never to be forgotten.

Meanwhile the poachers were making daring raids upon the baronet's covers, and he, thwarted in his chief desire, and exasperated by every fresh annoyance, became perfectly frantic in his rage against the marauders. More than once Mr. Hazelhurst gave him a friendly word of warning, speaking to him frankly of the disaffection which his harshness created among his poorer tenantry; but all in vain. Sir Oscar's excited imagination saw a poacher in every labourer on his estate, and the peasants were continually provoked by groundless accusations. At last a man was really taken red-handed by the keepers, and was duly committed for trial. Unfortunately, he rented a cottage on the baronet's land, and had a wife and a large family of young children. For these helpless creatures the rector and several kind-hearted persons interceded, but without success. They were turned out of their poor home, and forced to seek shelter in the workhouse.

But after that, there was more poaching than ever, and one night Lady Harriet's nerves were much shaken by an announcement from her nephew. He intended, he said, to "accompany the keepers to the covers, and look after the rascals for himself." His aunt protested, but he refused to draw back,—he had told the men he would go with them, and he should "enjoy the excitement."

"Supposing you should get hurt, Oscar?" argued Lady Harriet.

"No fear of that," he answered; "I'm well armed, and shall be a match for any fellow."

But it was with real uneasiness that her ladyship saw him depart.

It was a clear, frosty night, and the dry leaves crackled under the keepers' heavy tread, as Sir Oscar followed them through the dark wood paths to one of their lodges. He had consumed more than his usual quantity of wine at dinner, and when he reached the lodge he deemed it necessary to take a sup or two out of his brandy flask. He had also liberally provided the men with spirits, and they, following their master's bad example, drank to excess.

The distant church clock chimed eleven, and through the still night air Andrew Netley heard the musical strokes distinctly, as he was passing by the place where his old cottage stood. It was seldom, indeed, that Andrew was out at such a late hour as this. He had taken up his abode with the rector's gardener, and succeeded in getting sufficient employment to support himself, living a steady, temperate life, and cherishing with faithful love the memory of his lost wife. And now he was returning from the neighbouring seaport town, whither he had gone to see a sailor nephew whose ship had come in that very morning. It was his intention to return to Marksbourne by the carrier's cart, but he had somehow missed that conveyance, and had to perform the whole distance on foot. At first this had appeared to him as a serious hardship, for his injured knee greatly impeded his walking powers, but before that night was over, he thanked God that matters had fallen out as they had.

"Eleven!" said Andrew to himself as he counted the strokes. "Ah, what an old slow-coach I be!"

He sighed as his eyes rested on his old cottage, and stood still for a few minutes to contemplate the poor little place, and think of the happy days once spent within its walls. Then he drew nearer to the garden gate, and remained motionless, leaning against the walnut tree. He remembered the day when he had first brought his wife to her home; he thought of the time when their little child was born—the baby that only lived a few short weeks, and then went back again to God. Tears rolled fast down his cheeks, and he forgot his own weariness—forgot the keen night air. They—the wife and child—were taken, and he was left. He never knew how long he stood there, like a statue, under the bare boughs of the old tree; but the sound of a hoarse voice, speaking in subdued tones, brought him back to the present. And those muttered words kept Andrew still rooted to the spot, a silent listener.

"I tell 'ee I means to do for 'im. Han't he sent my sister and her children to the work'us? Han't he been a-hunting the poor as if they was wild beasts?"

"Yes, it's all true enough," returned a second voice, which sounded clearer than the first. "But he's a rich man, and—you'd swing for it, you know."

"I don't care much if I do. But there ain't no fear of that. Who's to swear to *me*, when there's a lot of us scufflin' about together like? And my face is covered up with this here black stuff!"

"It don't matter to me what happens to him," rejoined

the second speaker ; " if he wants to keep a whole skin he'd better stay in his big house and drink his wine, instead of troubling himself to hunt for poachers. But p'raps we shan't come across him, after all."

" I tell 'ee I means to come across 'un," said the other, doggedly.

Then there was silence, broken only by a cautious rustling in the underwood, as if some persons were creeping stealthily through the brambles and leafless branches. Andrew shivered as he stood listening, and a great horror fell upon him, for he fancied that he could understand the meaning of the words. Did they not apply to Sir Oscar Northwood ?

He looked again at his old home, and with that look came the recollection of his wife's earnest entreaty ; bidding him do Sir Oscar a good turn if he ever had the chance. Was that chance coming now ? Was there to be granted to him an opportunity of rewarding evil with good ? And as he thought of this a great struggle began in his soul,—a struggle of two natures warring one against the other ;—there, in the winter darkness and stillness, the angels of God and the emissaries of the devil encompassed him round about, and without him and within him the mysterious battle went on. Should he peril his own life for Sir Oscar's sake ? Or should he leave the man who had so cruelly injured him to his fate ?

It was soon over, and then he covered his face for an instant and prayed God to strengthen him. After that he crept with quiet steps towards a gate which led into the covers, and softly tried its fastenings, but they were

firm, so that he continued to crouch along in the shadow of the hedge, seeking for a gap. He found one at last and forced his way through it, dragging his stout cudgel after him. Once within the woods, he resolved to bend his steps towards the keepers' lodge, and give them warning that mischief was intended. If, as he suspected, Sir Oscar himself was with them, he determined to tell him frankly of the threats he had overheard.

He was making up his mind as to what he should say when he first presented himself before a man who would probably swear at him and suspect him; when the report of a gun echoed sharply through the woods. Then there were shouts, cries for help, and sounds of struggling, all strangely blended together; and the noises proceeded from the very quarter towards which he was hastening. He redoubled his speed now, and firmly grasping his trusty stick he went crashing through the underwood as fast as his lameness would permit. The cries still continued, and more shots were fired, but Andrew was little prepared for what was to follow.

Shaking himself free of the clinging brambles, he dashed out into a side-path where the ground was comparatively clear. Here it was not so dark, and the bright stars might be seen overhead. But what was this? A tall figure muffled oddly about the throat and face, stood directly in front of Andrew, striking heavy blows upon something which lay upon the ground.

Netley was still a powerful man, and he felt that he had need of all his strength at that moment. Over the prostrate body of Sir Oscar, lying motionless among the



dry leaves and dead boughs, a hand-to-hand fight took place. But the victory was on Andrew's side, and swiftly and surely he forced the desperate ruffian farther and farther from the place where his victim lay. Then the two men closed with each other, wrestling, and straining, and grappling with all their might. They fell, rolling over and over on the path, but still clinging together, until at last the iron grasp round Andrew's waist relaxed,—he was uppermost, and he felt that the mastery was his. But suddenly a sharp pang—a strange stinging pain—shot through his side. With some difficulty he raised himself from the body of his fallen foe, and shouted for help, while he dealt the man another blow to keep him quiet.

Assistance was not far off, and several keepers rushed to the spot, for the other poachers had gone off. Some of them lifted up Sir Oscar and bore him away, while one or two others gathered round the baronet's assailant, raising him less gently from the ground.

“You've fought like a man,” said one of them to Netley. “Can't ye lend a hand with him now?”

“I think I'm 'most done,” replied Andrew quietly, and they saw him press his hand hard upon his side. Other men were forthcoming, and an old neighbour of Andrew's took him by the arm and led him to the keeper's lodge.

There was much confusion in the Abbey that night. Servants were running to and fro, and an eminent surgeon was summoned from the nearest town to examine Sir Oscar's injuries. And when the cold grey dawn stole in through the little casement of the lodge, it fell

upon Andrew's patient face as he lay on the brick floor, with the village doctor's assistant stooping over him, and the rector by his side.

"It's all right," he whispered with a smile. "I've saved his life, and—I'm going home,—home to *her*. The fellow stabbed sharp, doctor,—sharp and deep."

The rector bent his head nearer to the dying man, and clasped the chill fingers in his own, while he spoke in a low voice,—telling him of the Life Everlasting.

"You'll give my love and duty to Miss Faith, sir," said Andrew, "and you'll tell her that all the revengeful feelings are gone,—I'm quite happy and contented. And God bless you, sir, a thousand times, for coming to me now!"

His life was fast ebbing away, for the wound was bleeding inwardly. He lay still and tranquil—his head resting on the rector's arm, and his eyes fixed on the kind face that bent over him. And just as the wintry morning sunshine began to send feeble shafts of light into the deep shadows of the woods, the Angel of Death came and whispered "Peace."

Mr. Brixton gently laid back the lifeless head, and rose from his knees. And then, looking down for the last time on that quiet figure, he was reminded of the knight who slept so peacefully in the chancel of his old church ; and instinctively he uttered the words, "Faithful unto death."



CHAPTER XIX.

NOT DIVIDED.

THE winter was over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds had come again. All the orchards were full of bloom, and the hawthorn covered the hedges. It was May, soft and balmy, and the country side was fragrant with flowers.

Sir Oscar was still an invalid, just able now to creep about the Abbey grounds, leaning on his servant's arm. The rector had told him of Andrew Netley's end, simply giving him the story, without any comments of his own, and leaving him to think over it. Sir Oscar *did* think, but he could scarcely realize that the man to whom he had been such a bitter enemy had saved his life. And he who had dealt Andrew his death-blow was sentenced to transportation for life.

Marksbourne was quiet now; the covers were untroubled by poachers, and the poor tenantry were at peace. Sir Oscar's bailiff was a merciful man, and as the baronet's strength returned but slowly, the management of the estate was left to him.

Faith and Violet were together again, for Charles Redwyn had brought his wife to stay at her father's home. Faith's heart was lighter now that Violet was in the house, and even the colonel's habitual grimness relaxed under her influence. She—the young bride—was so happy, so thoroughly was she contented with her lot, that it was a pleasure to be in her company. As yet not a single shadow had fallen across her path, and Faith was never weary of listening to her descriptions of her pretty home in the north. Charles, too, was everything that could be desired; just the protector and companion for gentle, timid Violet. So the time passed swiftly and pleasantly enough; but a day was coming which should stir all these hearts to their depths, and bring about results of which they little dreamed.

“Charlie, won't you take us out on the sea to-day?” asked Violet, as they sat at the breakfast-table on a cer-

tain fair May morning. "You know I'm longing to get a whiff of the dear old briny breezes, and so is Faith."

"Yes, I'm ready to go," answered her husband; "and as soon as you have finished your breakfast we'll drive down to the shore, and find Sam Brock."

The plan was carried out, and stores of good things were packed in hampers for the impromptu water-picnic. The three—Faith, Violet, and Charles—set off in high spirits, leaving the colonel at home to do battle with his old enemy, the gout. Eliza, too, formed one of the little party, and on that day she had confided a secret to her mistress,—she was going to be married. Poor Eliza! she almost wished afterwards that she had kept the fact to herself.

It occurred to them on their way to the shore that the Hazelhursts might be glad to join in the excursion. Mr. Hazelhurst's house lay directly in their route, so the carriage was stopped at the door, and Ada, Kate, and Julia agreed to follow their friends to the sea-side. Then they drove on, and soon came in sight of the school-house, and the scattered cots of the fisher-folk, all looking better and neater than they had done in years gone by. But here a slight disappointment awaited them, for Sam Brock, on whose company they had reckoned, was absent from home.

"There's Harry Gower, sir, as is a new comer," said a little fellow who was mending nets on the shingle. "He've got a pretty little craft as ever you see. Shall I fetch him to you, sir?"

Charles assented, and followed the urchin along the beach, while Faith and Violet were soon surrounded by

a group of their old acquaintances. Margaret Warner, a handsome, dark-eyed matron, was spending a day or two with her mother in Brock's cottage, and she came forward with her rosy baby in her arms to give them an affectionate greeting. And just then, Faith caught sight of the rector's figure emerging from one of the poorer dwellings. He was looking pale and worn, as both the sisters saw at a glance when he joined them.

"You are overworking yourself, Mr. Brixton," said Violet, with real concern; "you look so tired. And now I must insist that you come with us for a sail; you won't refuse me, will you? It will do you no end of good."

The rector was weary in body and mind, and he knew that the brief respite from active duties would be of real benefit to him. It was a rare thing for him to join in a pleasure-party, nevertheless on this occasion he yielded without much pressing, sending a messenger to the rectory to give notice that he should not return to lunch. His ready compliance surprised as well as pleased the whole party, for by this time the Hazelhursts had put in an appearance, bringing with them their youngest brother, a schoolboy of twelve years old. Then Charles came back with the tidings that Harry Gower's craft was highly satisfactory, and they all set off together to the water's edge, where a very small boat was waiting to convey them out to the tiny yacht which danced upon the bright waves.

"What a wee boat, Charlie!" said Violet, as she stepped in. "Why, it won't hold us all!"

"No," returned her husband; "it will have to make two voyages."

The pretty "yacht" (for such its owner persisted in styling it) reminded them all of a child's toy, so gaily was it painted and decorated. A fresh breeze was blowing, but it was a favouring wind, and no shadow of doubt crossed their minds as to the safety of their fairy vessel. She cut her way through the clear green billows like a living thing, sometimes sending a shower of glistening spray over her merry crew; but this only caused fresh bursts of mirth, for the party were in high glee. Even Mr. Brixton's gravity seemed to have passed away, and he entered into the spirit of the hour. Faith was perhaps the quietest of them all.

"Isn't this splendid?" said the rector, coming to her side. "Just look at the coast-line, Miss Faith; we are putting plenty of space between that and us. Doesn't the sea air invigorate you?"

It did after a while. On and on they sped, impelled by that strong breeze, until the morning hours passed into noontide, and their provisions were spread temptingly on the deck, when they partook of some refreshment.

Somewhere about the middle of the afternoon the strong wind died, and they began to think of returning. That would be slower work, the waterman told them; but they were in no haste to bring the day's pleasure to an end.

"I don't care about going back," said Ada Hazelhurst, gaily. "Just think how dull and prosaic the land will seem! I'm half inclined to envy the mermaids, aren't you, Violet?"

"There are no such things as mermaids," exclaimed

Frank, her schoolboy brother; "and if there are, their company wouldn't suit you, Ada. How do you suppose you would get on under the sea, with no circulating library, no dressmakers and milliners, and knickknacks and fal-lals?"

The laugh at Ada's expense was checked midway by an exclamation from Harry Gower. He called out, in a voice, which startled his hearers by its unnatural sound, "We're sinking fast! she has sprung a leak!"

His words were followed by a loud cry from some of the terrified girls, and Mr. Brixton and Charles Redwyn came hastily forward to examine the hold. It was too true, the boards had parted, and the little vessel was rapidly filling with water. Vainly they looked around for some means of stopping the leak, but this was already beyond their power; and they gazed into each other's faces with unspeakable horror.

"Oh, do save us!" cried poor Ada, clasping her hands. "It will break their hearts at home to lose us. Oh, poor papa and mamma!"

"Hush!" said the rector, gently. "There's the boat, you know."

"Yes, yes! Oh, let us have it lowered at once. Please don't delay, or we shall all be drowned!"

The boat was got ready, and the young ladies were with difficulty restrained from upsetting it in their eagerness to crowd in. Faith alone remained calm, although her face was very pale, and Eliza stood silently by her side.

"It won't hold us all," said Charles, hoarsely. "What's to be done?"

"Some of us must remain here," returned the rector, in a quiet tone ; "and I will be one."

"No, Mr. Brixton," exclaimed Charles, "that mustn't be."

"Make haste, make haste!" pleaded the girls' voices. "Let us all try to get in."

"That's impossible!" resumed the rector, as he helped Violet into the boat wherein the three Hazelhursts and their brother were already seated.

"That little cockle-shell won't hold more than six persons!" groaned Gower.

Violet's face became absolutely livid as she stretched out her arms to her husband.

"Oh, Charlie, *you* will come!"

"One man must go to take the sculls," said the rector, "and that must be you, Mr. Redwyn. But"—and he glanced around as he spoke—"the boat will only hold six besides little Frank."

The only two women remaining on the deck were Faith and Eliza.

"Come, Miss Faith." The rector took her hand as he spoke ; but she held back.

"Go on, Eliza," she said, in her clear firm tones ; "I shall stay here."

The rector's hands tightened on hers with a convulsive grasp, and a wild cry burst from Violet.

"No, no, dear Miss Faith!" pleaded Eliza ; "let me stay. Go, please go, and save yourself."

But Faith laid her disengaged hand on the faithful woman's shoulder, and pushed her forward, saying.—

"Remember what you told me this morning, Eliza. I have no ties ; I am quite free."

“Faith, this is madness!” cried Charles, trembling with impatience.

“No, it isn’t madness, dear Charlie; I’m not afraid to die.”

Once more the rector, white and speechless now, tried to force her into the boat, and once more she resisted him.

“Make haste!” she entreated, “you know I never swerve. Get in, Charlie, row as fast to land as you can, and send some one to rescue us.”

She knew that this was only a delusive hope. Their vessel would sink before aid could reach them from the distant shore. But it served to soothe Violet and the other girls. Trembling and reluctant, Eliza stepped in, and Charles followed.

“Good-bye, my darling,” said Faith, bending down and speaking to her sister with a strange bright smile. “Good-bye. God bless you for ever and ever.”

“Oh, not good-bye,” moaned Violet, while her husband laboured at the oars, and the laden boat moved slowly away. The three who remained, watched it for some moments in utter silence; but at last the rector turned almost sternly towards Faith.

“What have you done?” he asked. “Oh, Faith, why didn’t you save yourself?”

“And leave another to perish?” she returned. “Would that have been well, Mr. Brixton?”

He did not reply, although his lips moved as if he would fain have spoken.

Poor Harry Gower was making efforts to bale out the water, but the sea came in too fast for that and Faith watched the receding boat with earnest eyes.

"Thank God that Violet and Charlie are safe!" she murmured; and then her glance came back to Mr. Brixton's face, and she drew nearer to him.

"Oh, you will be so sadly missed!" she said. "Who will go on with your work, or do what you have done? Mine is only a poor, useless little life; but yours——"

"I am not troubling about myself," he answered; "I have never counted my life dear. It is for you, my child."

"But why grieve about me? Violet and Charlie will take care of papa, and comfort aunt Dorcas;—I have few ties."

"Oh, Faith," he whispered, "it is a strange time to speak of earthly love when death is so near. But I have loved you always, always——"

They drew closer together, and the sea gurgled and murmured around; and the water surged over the deck, circling and splashing about their feet.

"There will be no parting for us," she said, softly.

"None. And perhaps it is better as it is for us both. We are looking forward to something brighter than this present world, Faith; and in our death we shall not be divided."

Faster and faster the cruel sea made its way through the planks. The boat could no longer be seen, and the salt waves saturated Faith's dress. But the two who stood clinging together on that sinking vessel were at peace.

* * * * *

One morning in early June, when the birds were twittering and chirping around the nests that lay so cunningly concealed amid the thick ivy, and the white

roses were swayed by the softest of summer winds,
Faith awoke from a long dream.

She was lying in her own bed. The chintz curtains were drawn back, and the window had been opened a little way, so that the bird-notes and flower-scents drifted into the room together. But the Venetian blind was partly closed, and the familiar objects in the chamber could be seen but dimly in the subdued light. Yet Faith could distinguish her Bible, and prayer-book, and hymnal, placed as usual on the small table, and there were the illuminated letters of the well-known text upon the wall. She looked languidly about her, conscious of a curious sensation in her head which warned her instinctively that she must not try to realize her own position; and above all, she did not dare to think over that strange dream that was past now.

It had been indeed a strange and terrible dream. She had stood with the rector on the deck of a sinking vessel, feeling the chill water creep higher and higher, and knowing that in a little while even Mr. Brixton's strong arm would be unable to hold her head above those pitiless waves. She remembered vaguely how he had spoken of the land where there shall be no more sea, and how he had prayed that One who once walked upon the troubled waves of Galilee might be with them in their hour of need. And then it had seemed to her as if the ocean murmurs were drowned in the rich, deep music of the organ, and instead of the waste of waters the grand white arches of the ancient church encompassed them on every side. There were the glorious windows, burning with purple and crimson, green and

gold,—there were the sculptured forms of saints and angels,—there was the marble knight upon his chancel tomb. And again and again rose the burst of Alleluia,—the Easter anthem of thanksgiving and praise.

What part of this was real, and what was unreal, she was totally unable to decide. She felt that she had been very ill,—that it would be quite impossible even to raise herself from the pillows without assistance. But she longed just to ask one or two questions, and then to fall asleep.

Presently Eliza crept softly to the bedside, and Faith tried to speak, but her words were so low and faint that the faithful servant only guessed at their meaning. She rightly divined, however, what it was that her mistress wanted to know, and whispered in return, “It’s all well, be quiet now, and you shall know everything by and by. But *all’s well*.”

“All’s well.” Faith gratefully rested her heart upon the words. And after that came Violet, but she did not speak,—she only laid her fair face close to her sister’s and soothed her to repose.

At last the day came when Faith was able to be pillowled up in bed, and to hear the story of her great peril and deliverance from Violet’s lips. With returning strength her memory came back to her, and she knew that the sinking ship had been a reality. But how had she been saved, and the rector, and Harry Gower?

Then Violet told her, speaking with grateful tears, that honest Sam Brock had been cruising about in his fishing-boat, and had heard Harry Gower’s desperate shout of distress. He was but just in time to rescue

them, for the rector was clinging to the mast with one arm, and holding Faith with the other. Of the gladness and thankfulness of those on shore, when their friends were restored to them, Violet could say little, her voice failed, and she could only lay her head on her sister's pillow and weep.

During Faith's illness, Colonel Harrowby had been like one distracted. He knew that the long course of trial and persecution which she had undergone had enfeebled her nerves, so that when fever attacked her, it found an easy prey. For weeks he dared not rejoice that she had been saved from drowning, for it seemed that she was only given back to him to be taken away again. Poor Aunt Dorcas, herself overcome with sorrow, did her best to soothe him, but it was to the rector that he turned chiefly for sympathy and comfort. And long before Faith was able to leave her sick chamber the colonel and Mr. Brixton were made friends.

And here I would fain bring my story to an end, but for the overweening curiosity of those who would be ill-satisfied with such a termination. For their sakes, therefore, I will add that about six months after Faith's complete recovery there was another marriage in Marksbourne church. I cannot tell you what a happy wedding it was,—I have no words for that. But I know that the beautiful old church was crowded from west to east, and that the best of all the bridal gifts were the prayers and blessings of the poor.

And Colonel Harrowby went to live at the rectory.







